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## Between the Judean Desert and Gaza: Asceticism and the Monastic Communities of Palestine in the Sixth Century

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BETWEEN THE JUDEAN DESERT AND GAZA: ASCETICISM  
AND THE MONASTIC COMMUNITIES OF PALESTINE IN THE  
SIXTH CENTURY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of the Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by  
Austin McCray  
B.A., University of North Florida, 2013  
M.A., University of Florida, 2015  
May 2020

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Austin Stephen McCray

For Tierra

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## **Abstract**

The dissertation focuses on the religious culture of Christian monasticism in sixth-century Palestine. Rather than see the monastic communities of the Judean Desert, just to the east of Jerusalem, and those around Gaza as two independent monastic regions, as much scholarship has done, the dissertation focuses on the common threads that can be seen in the monastic teachings and idealized ascetic practices in the literature of the area. This dissertation reveals ways to redefine the boundaries between the monastic communities of Palestine during the sixth century as well as emphasizes the continuities between the monks of the Judean Desert and Gaza by providing an alternative perspective by which to examine their monastic traditions. This is achieved by focusing on the monastic teachings and idealized ascetic practices emphasized in the Greek monastic literature of sixth-century Palestine, particularly the hagiographies of Cyril of Scythopolis and the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John the Prophet. Rather than look outward, examining how Palestinian monks impacted ecclesiastical and social structures, the dissertation instead faces inward towards the monastic communities themselves. Through this method the dissertation provides a textually rich description of the monastic landscape of late antique Palestine while highlighting the varieties of monasticism which persisted through the sixth century.

## Introduction

Writing in the mid-sixth century, Cyril of Scythopolis described Euthymios' prime motivation for leaving his hometown monastery at Melitene in Armenia and coming to Palestine as a desire to inhabit the desert.<sup>1</sup> The actions involved with this transition can be conceived of as pilgrimage. Euthymios' first actions on arriving at Jerusalem were to venerate the holy places and then the holy men of the nearby Judean Desert. It was only after these acts of pilgrimage that Euthymios settled in a cell to learn how to attain the proper ascetic virtues and seek perfection. This transition from pilgrimage to the monastery and the ascetic self also represents the intellectual peregrination which led to the creation of this dissertation. What began as an interest in pilgrimage developed into an examination of the monks that engaged in this practice and the sources which described them, especially those of Palestine itself. The process of examining the place of pilgrimage in the monastic life required further investigation into what it meant to be a monk, what the idealized monk should look like, and how they were presented in the surviving sources. This investigation soon became the central focus, with a particular interest in the monastic communities of both the Judean Desert to the east of Jerusalem and Gaza that prospered in the sixth century. Despite the fact these two regions lie less than 70km (43mi) apart and in the same Roman province—*Palestina Prima*—modern scholarship on late antique Christian monasticism within Palestine has created intellectual boundaries between the monastic communities of the Judean Desert and Gaza. The communities of the Judean Desert and those in

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<sup>1</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius*, in *Kyrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 14.1.



the region of Gaza are seen as distinct from one another, part of two divergent monastic traditions.<sup>2</sup>

I seek to complicate this scholarly understanding of the monastic communities of Palestine by providing an alternative perspective by which to examine the monastic traditions the Judean Desert and Gaza. This dissertation reveals ways to redefine the boundaries between the monastic communities of Palestine during the sixth century as well as emphasizes the continuities between the monks of the Judean Desert and Gaza. This is achieved by focusing on the monastic teachings and idealized ascetic practices emphasized in the Greek monastic literature of sixth-century Palestine, particularly the hagiographies of Cyril of Scythopolis and the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John the Prophet. Rather than look outward, examining how Palestinian monks impacted ecclesiastical and social structures, the dissertation instead faces inward towards the monastic communities themselves. The interest is on how Christological controversies and imperial decrees impacted the monastery rather than the other way around. Through this method I provide a textually rich description of the monastic landscape of late antique Palestine.

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<sup>2</sup> Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "Territory, Anti-Intellectual Attitude, and Identity Formation in Late Antique Palestinian Monastic Communities," *Religion & Theology* 17 (3–4) (2010): 247; Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony & Aryeh Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 7: "While Judean Desert monasticism in late antiquity grew to a large extent around the holy places, looking to Jerusalem as the holy city, this was not the case with Gaza monasticism. As reflected in the *Life of Hilarion*—the first Palestinian monk from the Gaza region known to us—Gaza monasticism throughout this period is marked by the influence of Egyptian Monasticism."; Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 15: "South of Jerusalem and the Judean Desert, monasticism had another orientation. Asceticism in the region of Gaza was rooted in the deserts of Egypt."; Jan-Eric Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), 24–25: "...the cultural dependency of Palestinian monasticism to Egypt, based on the veneration of the great fathers of the Egyptian deserts and the theological heritage of Athanasius, Cyril and Dioscorus, remained as strong as ever."; Daniël Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy: A New Perspective on Cyril of Scythopolis' Monastic Biographies as Historical Sources for Sixth-Century Origenism* (Roma: Centro studi SAnselmo, 2001), 32.

It is important to note that I do not wish to create a homogeneous visage of monasticism in the region. There was not a single monastic community, but instead there were multiple communities, as I have chosen to indicate in the title. The monastic communities of Palestine were an amalgamation of peoples and ideas from throughout the Mediterranean world. The allure of experiencing the Holy Land brought a multitude of monks, and pilgrims turned monks, to the province each influenced by different monastic traditions. That said, I do argue that the understanding of asceticism and monastic practices does serve as a common thread between the communities of Gaza and the Judean Desert, bounding them together. The dissertation provides an alternative perspective on the monasteries of Palestine, presenting the commonalities which existed between the Judean Desert and Gaza rather than emphasizing differences. This approach highlights the continued flexibility of monasticism throughout the sixth century. Throughout late antiquity the monastic endeavor, at its core, remained a personally driven and interior endeavor. Amidst the ascetic takeover of ecclesiastical authority, and the institutionalization of asceticism, which culminated in the sixth century, at the forefront of monastic concerns was still the individual monk, of what was beneficial for the soul and aided in the creation of a new self, of how to become a citizen of heaven.<sup>3</sup>

Arguments for the uniqueness of a specific form of monasticism are difficult to make as the scholarly impulse in the face of such claims are generally to look at individual elements and point to antecedents which disprove the “unique” qualities. It is certainly true that monasticism

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<sup>3</sup> R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 17, 196-97, 214; Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 133; Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 6-7. This is not meant to deny the importance or impact of these works, but instead to offer an alternative perspective focused on the monastery.

in the sixth century in general was influenced by its progenitors of the fourth century and that Palestinian monasticism specifically features individual elements which can be seen in earlier periods and sources. However, the specific way that these elements come together and are emphasized in the examined sources is distinct. To that end, there are three connected elements of Palestinian monasticism which, through the course of the dissertation, will be identified as what makes Palestinian monasticism unique.

Palestinian authors in both the Judean Desert and Gaza emphasized the importance of a semi-anchoritic form of monasticism within an organized monastic system. An anchoritic life of *hesychia* during the week with communal church services during the weekend was deemed as spiritually superior.<sup>4</sup> However, a monk must pass through a coenobitic formation under the tutelage and guidance of advanced monks prior to reaching the *laura* and its specific form of monasticism. As a product of this emphasis on a semi-anchoritic monasticism and a life of stillness, the authority in Palestinian monasteries was also commonly shared between abbots and spiritual directors.<sup>5</sup> Abbots wielded administrative and hierarchal authority, which allowed spiritual directors to focused purely on the attainment of spiritual perfection and a holy status which came with it. Abbots and spiritual directors worked together to educate and administer the needs of their monks while promoting a form of monasticism which emphasized the importance of inner spirituality. A monk's spiritual director did not always reside within the same monastery. This was especially the case due to the split between coenobia and *lauras*, as novice monks were required to begin in the coenobium and many advanced monks preferred the

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<sup>4</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 50.4; *Life of Sabas*, 91.8; *Life of Cyriacus*, 224.23.

<sup>5</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter Two below, at times the same individual held these positions. However, the sources frequently present individuals holding one or the other, allowing for a distribution of authority within the monasteries of Palestine.

stillness that the laura provided. This situation required monks to periodically travel to other monasteries for ascetic and spiritual guidance. This highlights the importance of mobility in Palestinian monasticism. These elements and the particular manner in which they manifested in sixth-century Palestine stand out as distinctive as will be detailed and expanded upon throughout the course of the dissertation.

From a methodological standpoint I am not attempting to pull apart the curtain of the presented worldview of the examined authors in an attempt to reveal the hidden historical reality in which the authors formed their thoughts. I instead am interested in examining the staged setting they have created. We will be examining the idealized monastic life as expressed in the sources, what monks should aspire to and what some were able to achieve. This does not necessarily reflect the true reality of the historical situation, nor cover all possible permutations of monasticism within Palestine. Instead, I examine what the authors wanted their readers to take away rather than a grounded reality of any sort. The same can be said for the historical figures. Barsanuphius, John the Prophet, Sabas, Euthymios, and the other examined individuals are all constructions of Cyril or the editor of the *Correspondence* and it is from this perspective that this dissertation will proceed.

The reigns of Justin (r. 518-27) and especially Justinian (r. 527-65), when Cyril, Barsanuphius, John the Prophet, and Dorotheos lived and wrote, were periods of attempts at roman reunification and the reassertion of imperial control. Those that lived during the first half of the sixth century witnessed the conquests of North Africa and Italy, a brief glimpse at the possibility of a reunified empire.<sup>6</sup> It was also these emperors who had a reinvigorated interest in

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<sup>6</sup> J. A. S. Evans, *The Age of Justinian: The Circumstances of Imperial Power*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 126-82. Cyril has Sabas interact with Justinian and foresees the emperor's conquest. See Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 175.20-176.

a united Christianity as defined by adherence to Chalcedon.<sup>7</sup> It was in response to these imperial actions that during the first half of the sixth century the split between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians permanently solidified with the establishment of independent Christian entities.<sup>8</sup>

The sixth century was also a period on the brink of change throughout the Mediterranean world. Palestinian monasticism reached its zenith in the sixth century. While the Sassanian and Islamic invasions of the seventh century did not bring about the end of monasticism in the region, it was reduced to a lesser state. John Moschos was a witness to the beginning of these changes. He heard about the Sassanian capture of Jerusalem in 614 while in Alexandria and subsequently fled to Constantinople and then eventually Rome.<sup>9</sup> It was against the backdrop of these momentous shifts in the history of the Mediterranean world that the examined monastic authors of Palestine sought to collect and provide examples and advice on how to live an ascetic life.

### **Source Overview**

#### *Cyril of Scythopolis*

Cyril of Scythopolis' *Lives of the Monks of Palestine* is a collection of hagiographies of seven central monastic figures—Euthymios, Sabas, John the Hesychast, Cyriacus, Theodosios,

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<sup>7</sup> This will be discussed in Chapter Four below. Evans, *The Age of Justinian*, 183-92; Volker Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, Oxford Early Christian Studies, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2-8, 248.

<sup>8</sup> Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, 2-8; James Goehring, *Politics, Monasticism, and Miracles in Sixth Century Upper Egypt: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Coptic Texts on Abraham of Farshut*, Studien Und Texte Zu Antike Und Christentum: 69 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 32-67.

<sup>9</sup> Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2014), 108.

Theognios, and Abraamios—of the Judean Desert in the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>10</sup> While Cyril discusses the lives of all seven of these individuals, the lives of Euthymios and Sabas dominate the text itself as well as Cyril's narrative of the monastic communities of the Judean Desert. Through these lives, Cyril maintains the Chalcedonian orthodoxy of the monastic community of Palestine and its leaders.

Cyril himself was born in Scythopolis—the capital of second Palestine—around 525 CE. Cyril presented his parents as devout Christians with his father serving as an assessor for the bishop of Scythopolis and his mother as a disciple of the monks of the Judean Desert.<sup>11</sup> Cyril presented himself as connected with the Judean Desert, and Sabas especially, from an early age. When Sabas came to Scythopolis around 530/31 as part of the delegation declaring Justinian's rescripts, Cyril states that the elder blessed him and declared him a disciple, urging the bishop of Scythopolis to train him.<sup>12</sup>

At some point during his youth Cyril entered the monastic life in the monastery at Beella, just outside of Scythopolis, while a monk named George was abbot. It was to George that Cyril dedicated his lives of Euthymios and Sabas. In 543, when Cyril was eighteen, he left his monastery at Scythopolis and came to Jerusalem and the Judean Desert. Per his mother's request, Cyril sought out John the Hesychast at the Great Laura and asked for his advice.<sup>13</sup> John urged

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<sup>10</sup> I have made use of Edward Schwartz's 1939 Greek critical edition.

<sup>11</sup> For Cyril's father see Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 180.5. Cyril related that his mother would regularly host monks in their home, and it was she who urged Cyril to seek out John the Hesychast when he left for the Judean Desert. See Cyril, *Life of John*, 217.15-20.

<sup>12</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, in *Kyrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 180.10-15.

<sup>13</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, in *Kyrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 216.20.

Cyril to enter the Coenobium of Euthymios in order to receive the proper monastic training. However, out of pride and the desire to enter a laura, Cyril instead went to the Laura of Calamon, near the Jordan.<sup>14</sup> Cyril reported that he was punished for this decision by becoming sick for six months before receiving a vision of John the Hesychast who again told him to enter the Coenobium of Euthymios. This time Cyril consented and became a monk of the coenobium in 544. He remained at Euthymios' monastery until 555 when, with the approval of John, Cyril transitioned to the New Laura as one of the new orthodox occupants following the expulsion of the Origenists from the laura.<sup>15</sup>

It was at the New Laura that Cyril would write and organize his lives. He stated that while at the Coenobium of Euthymios he had begun to gather tales on Euthymios and Sabas, but it was only after transitioning to the laura that he began to produce the hagiographies. Cyril produced his seven lives in the span of two years. Cyril concluded John the Hesychast's life in 557, while the elder was still alive, and this is chronologically the last time we hear of Cyril. Due to this it has been tentatively suggested that Cyril died soon after. Whether this is true or not, it is the last we hear of Cyril.

Cyril presents two central motivations for writing his lives. The first was to write down the ascetic and holy aspects of his figures' lives in order for them to serve as "a common benefit, image, and model" for other monks seeking perfection.<sup>16</sup> Cyril meant for his lives to offer

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<sup>14</sup> A laura was a community of recluses. Monks would live in seclusion, dispersed in cells around a centralized location, during the week and then came together for communal church services over the weekend. This form of monastery stands in contrast to the coenobium in which monks were expected to remain in continual contact with each other.

<sup>15</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 83.15.

<sup>16</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 8.16. κοινὸν ὄφελος καὶ εἰκόνα καὶ τύπον.

examples of the proper ascetic praxis by which monks could spiritually progress towards perfection. In connection with this was the fear that the examples of figures such Sabas or Euthymios could fall into oblivion of time and be forgotten. Cyril presented himself as saving his subjects from such a fate.<sup>17</sup> In connection with this desire to ensure the survival of the memory of his monastic fathers, Cyril's second motivation for writing the lives was to combat the hagiography of heretical figures. Cyril found the fact that hagiographies had been written praising the lives and deeds of 'heretical' figures while the lives of orthodox monks were fading away disturbing and sought to rectify it through his lives.<sup>18</sup>

### *John Moschos*

John Moschos was a Greek-speaking monk from the Monastery of Saint Theodosios in the Judean Desert, east of Bethlehem. Along with his companion, Sophronios, he traveled throughout the eastern Mediterranean, seeking out holy and ascetic individuals in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. He compiled the tales and lessons that he learned into his collection of beneficial tales known as the *Spiritual Meadow* in Rome after 614.<sup>19</sup>

The *Meadow* is a collection of ascetic wisdom intended to help a monk's spiritual journey, bound into the recollections of Moschos' physical pilgrimages and wanderings across the eastern Mediterranean. According to the *Meadow*, Moschos spent over forty years periodically seeking out holy individuals, and collecting their stories, throughout the eastern Mediterranean. He started his monastic career at the Judean coenobium of St Theodosios located

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<sup>17</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 8.15. Cyril presented this as the case with Eutymius in particular, who had died over eighty years prior to the writing of his life. See Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 86-86.5.

<sup>18</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 6.5.

<sup>19</sup> John Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, In *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Graeca, Vol. 87:3, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1865).



east of Bethlehem. Around 568 he transitioned to the Laura of Pharan located North East of Jerusalem and spent a decade there. It was in the beginning of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius II in 578 that Moschos traveled to Egypt with his companion Sophronios. He traveled throughout the region, with a number of tales originating from his time in Alexandria. He next traveled back to the Judean desert, staying at the Laura of the Ailiotes for another decade, possibly falling around 580 to 590. In 594 Moschos was in Jerusalem for the consecration of Amos as the Patriarch and continued to travel throughout the region.<sup>20</sup> Then, sometime during the first decade of the seventh century he left Palestine and traveled throughout Syria, including a visit to Antioch. He was back in Alexandria before 607 while Eulogios was still the Patriarch and was there when the news spread that Jerusalem had fallen to the Sasanian forces in 614 CE. Moschos and Sophronios then left the East and eventually made it to Rome where Moschos finished the *Meadow* and died, either in 619 or 634.

The *Spiritual Meadow* is a collection of 219 hagiographical or beneficial tales, similar in style to Palladius' *Lausiac History*, *The History of the Monks of Egypt*, or the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. Moschos organized the tales within the *Meadow* topically rather than organized chronologically based on his travels. While Moschos does not provide specific dates for all of his figures and tales as Cyril did, he does provide a historical framework. However, that framework requires an intimate knowledge of the locales and peoples of Palestinian monastic communities. Moschos is transparent about his motivation for writing the *Meadow* and provides insight into his intended audience. In the introduction of his text, he tells his pupil Sophronios that he has filled his *Meadow* with distinguished holy individuals, marked by various virtues and beloved by

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<sup>20</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 149.

God.<sup>21</sup> Moschos continues that he believes that in order to live a pious and a virtuous life one must read on others' ways of life.<sup>22</sup> Moschos felt that the tales he had collected were important for those who desired to pursue a virtuous monastic life. Thus, he intended his text to be read primarily by monks, particularly Chalcedonian monks, or lay individuals desiring to undertake an ascetic life.<sup>23</sup> However, before Moschos ever sat down to write, he felt the need to travel throughout the Eastern Mediterranean for his own benefit. While Moschos certainly included specific details of his text with a monastic audience in mind, at the core of his work is his own personal journey shaped by his conception of Christianity.

In regards to my use of the tales of Moschos' *Spiritual Meadow*, at times I will employ examples of individuals or tales that were not from Palestine or did not take place within the region. I believe these examples are still relevant as a reflection of Moschos' understanding of monasticism and asceticism which, I will reveal, was molded by and a product of his Palestinian environment. While he traveled and gathered tales throughout the eastern Mediterranean his understanding of asceticism and monasticism is a product of Palestine.

### *Manuscript Tradition*

The manuscript tradition of the *Spiritual Meadow* warrants caution. Due to the varied nature of the text, as a collection of beneficial tales, individuals early on began and continued to remove, copy, or add tales which they found useful. This has led to numerous manuscripts each

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<sup>21</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Intro.

<sup>22</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Intro.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Chadwick, "John Moschos and His Friend Sophronius the Sophist," *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974): 64.

containing various tales rather than a singular intact tradition.<sup>24</sup> Already by the ninth century Photius already knew of two different versions of the *Meadow*, one featuring 304 tales and the other 342.<sup>25</sup>

In 1423 Ambrogio Traversari made a Latin translation based off a twelfth-century codex (Laurentianus Plut.X.3) sent to him by the Archbishop of Crete in 1421.<sup>26</sup> This codex and Traversari's translation featured 300 individual tales. However, when it was printed in 1558 by Lippomano several tales were combined so that the number of tales was reduced to 219 which has remained the standard to present day.<sup>27</sup> In 1624 Fronton du Duc published 107 of the Greek tales alongside a reprint of Traversari's Latin in the second volume of his *Bibliotheca Veterum Patrum*. A majority of the remaining Greek tales were later published in 1681 by J. B. Cotelier in the second volume of the *Ecclesiae Graeca Monumenta*. Finally, in 1863 Migne combined these two Greek publications and placed them parallel to Traversari's Latin in his *Patrologia Graeca* lxxxvii. Unfortunately, there is currently no published critical edition of the text.<sup>28</sup> Instead Migne's edition remains the most used version and the one which I have made use of.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Philip Pattenden, "The Text of the "Pratum Spirituale", *Journal of Theological Studies* 26 (1975): 39; Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos' Spiritual Meadow: Authority and Autonomy at the End of the Antique World*. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 14-15; Chadwick, "John Moschus," 41-46.

<sup>25</sup> Chadwick, "John Moschus," 42.

<sup>26</sup> Chadwick, "John Moschus," 41.

<sup>27</sup> Chadwick, "John Moschus," 42.

<sup>28</sup> Philip Pattenden had been working on a critical edition since the 1970s, however, as far as I can ascertain it has never been published. Pattenden, "Text of the Pratum Spirituale"; Ihssen, *Moschos*, 16; Chadwick, "John Moschus," 41.

<sup>29</sup> Ihssen, *John Moschos*, 16.

Because of the fractured nature of the manuscript tradition I have emphasized trends which appear in multiple tales of the *Meadow* rather than solitary examples. Even if specific examples could have been composed by individuals other than Moschos there are others which reflect the same trends present in the monastic communities which I am interested in examining. In addition, many of the selected tales reveal an intimate knowledge of the environments of monasticism in the Judean Desert.

### *Barsanuphius and John the Prophet*

The *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John, compiled in Greek around 543 CE, is a collection of 850 questions and answers addressed to the anchorites Barsanuphius and John, also known as the Old Men, of the Monastery of Seridos at Tawatha located a few miles southwest of Gaza. We possess very little biographical information about Barsanuphius himself, besides that he lived and presumably began his monastic career somewhere in Egypt before arriving at the monastery of Tawatha in the early sixth century. Slightly more information is able to be gleaned from the *Correspondence* concerning John the Prophet who joined the community around 525-27 CE. The first fifty-four letters of the *Correspondence* are an exchange between Barsanuphius and a monk identified as John of Beersheba. Throughout these letters Barsanuphius is assisting this John with his spiritual advancement, specifically his transition to a life of *hesychia* while simultaneously facilitating his transfer to the Monastery of Seridos. Due to the inclusion and centrality of such a large number of letters attached to one individual and the timing of Beersheba's transition to the monastery it has been suggested that John of Beersheba and John the Prophet are the same individual.<sup>30</sup> Given the arguments put forth, especially by Jennifer

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<sup>30</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 38-44.

Hevelone-Harper, I have tentatively accepted this identification and the reader should keep this in mind proceeding forth. Throughout the dissertation the name John of Beersheba will be used to identify those early letters before John's ascension to spiritual director. After this transition and when John is writing letters of his own, John or John the Prophet will be used. These Old Men of Gaza along with Seridos, the abbot, worked to oversee the spiritual and physical needs of the community. The monastery thus adopted a semi-anchoretic model, with the Old Men withdrawing to their own cells with limited physical contact while Seridos managed the administrative duties of the monastery.

Within the corpus of evidence we possess for fifth and sixth century Palestinian monasticism, *The Correspondence* provides an in depth examination of the monastery of Tawatha—particularly the spiritual leadership of the two Old Men—over a twenty year period from the arrival of John until his death. In order to continue to advise other monks of the community as well as individuals throughout Palestine while secluded both John and Barsanuphius selected a disciple—Seridos for Barsanuphius and Dorotheus of Gaza for John—who were the only individuals allowed to actually see and speak with the Old Men. The written word then served a central role in the monastic milieu. The Old Men were at the center of a network of letter writers among the literate lay and monastic individuals of Gaza and the larger Palestinian province. While illiterate individuals could come to monastery to have their questions written down, the tradition of oral advice had shifted to the written word.<sup>31</sup> Through the range of individuals that wrote to the Old Men, *The Correspondence* provides an insight into a wider range of late antique society than the hagiographic nature of our other sources.

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<sup>31</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 35-36.

A unique element of these letters is their joint authorship.<sup>32</sup> Although John continued to place his own authority under that of Barsanuphius, they maintained a unified structure of authority. The response of one of the Old Men was understood as representing both, for instance when individuals tried to write to both anchorites seeking a different answer they received a warning against such actions and the united nature of the Olden Men.<sup>33</sup> That said, the personal qualities of the Old Men can still be noticed in their individual letters. Barsanuphius tends toward the more abstract and spiritually intangible while John's letters are much shorter and focused on the physical.

A wide range of individuals, including monks, laymen, and even bishops wrote to the Old Men as charismatic authorities.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, these petitioners did not limit their questions to purely religious matters. Instead, these individuals considered the Old Men as a source of knowledge for all aspects of their lives. Whether legal or financial matters, personal relationships, or ecclesiastical and political disputes the authority of the anchorites extended far outside the realm of ascetic Christianity.<sup>35</sup> This fact is certainly connected to the fact that roughly a quarter of the letters were from lay individuals.<sup>36</sup> Another unique and important quality of the letter collection is the continued correspondence with single individuals. These letter series in some cases span multiple years and provide excellent examples of the master-disciple

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<sup>32</sup> Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, "The Letter Collection of Barsanuphius and John," *In Late Antique Letter Collections: a critical introduction and reference guide*, eds. Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, Edward J. Watts (University of California Press, 2016), 419.

<sup>33</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 142.

<sup>36</sup> Hevelone-Harper, "The Letter Collection of Barsanuphius and John," 418.

relationship—it should be mentioned that this relationship was not reserved for monks alone; any individual that wrote to the Old Men could conceive of themselves as a disciple—of late antique monasticism and the process of spiritual education.

### *Compilation of text*

As a text, the letters were compiled around 543 CE following the death of John and the complete withdrawal of Barsanuphius. The task was undertaken in order to ensure the survival of the Old Men's advice after they themselves had died or completely removed themselves from the community in the case of Barsanuphius. The compiler does not provide his name, however, Hevelone-Harper has persuasively argued that Dorotheus of Gaza himself might have taken up the task.<sup>37</sup> Whether this is accurate or not, the compiler usefully provided a brief synopsis of the initial question asked, by whom, and which of the anchorites responded. These synopses help to fully contextualize the guidance provided in the letter, which was equally important for the contemporary readers as it is for modern historians.<sup>38</sup> It is worth mentioning that as far as late antique compilations go, the *Correspondence* was a rather quick production in relation to when the individuals lived. As a comparison, Cyril of Scythopolis wrote his life of Sabas around 555 CE some twenty years after his death in 532 CE and this time gap is extended even further with his life of Euthymios who died in 473.

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<sup>37</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 76.

<sup>38</sup> The compiler himself stresses the need for the reader to be aware of who the Old Men were addressing in each letter as not all guidance is useful for everyone. Each individual, whether monk or layman needed different advice depending on their position in life and their spiritual journey.

### *Manuscript tradition*

The earliest extant manuscripts are Georgian translations dating to the tenth century.<sup>39</sup> Sections of the letters remained popular throughout the Eastern Mediterranean with various letter series appearing in numerous manuscripts throughout the Byzantine period. The largest production of the letters is connected to the monastic community of Mount Athos between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. A majority of these were only partial collections, copied for the various needs of the monks. However, there are two manuscripts from the fourteenth century that feature most the 850 letters.<sup>40</sup>

Shifting to modern editions, the prolific Jacques-Paul Migne published the letters relating to the discussion of Origenism as well as Dorotheus of Gaza in his *Patrologia Graeca*.<sup>41</sup> Nikodemos, an Orthodox monk from Mt. Athos, was the first to publish the letters in full in 1816, which were subsequently translated into Russian.<sup>42</sup> In 1960 Soterios Schoinas published a Greek edition based on Nikodemos' work. Finally, an edited volume was published between 1997 and 2002 by Francois Neyt and Paula de Angelis-Noahon in *Sources Chrétiennes* which is currently the standard scholarly edition to use.<sup>43</sup>

### *Dorotheos of Gaza*

Dorotheos of Gaza was a disciple of the Old Men of Gaza, eventually becoming the sole disciple allowed to physically see and talk with John the Prophet. He became a spiritual authority

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<sup>39</sup> Hevelone-Harper, "The Letter Collection of Barsanuphius and John," 422.

<sup>40</sup> Hevelone-Harper, "The Letter Collection of Barsanuphius and John," 422-23.

<sup>41</sup> Hevelone-Harper, "The Letter Collection of Barsanuphius and John," 423.

<sup>42</sup> Hevelone-Harper, "The Letter Collection of Barsanuphius and John," 423.

<sup>43</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, ix.



in his own right, possibly founding his own monastery and serving as a spiritual director. An anonymous monk compiled together a number of letters and sayings of Dorotheos for the benefit of the community.

Dorotheos was born in Antioch in the first decade of the sixth century into an upper-class Christian family and received a classic education in rhetoric.<sup>44</sup> After making his way to Gaza and entering into the Monastery of Seridos, the abbot made use of Dorotheos' education and medical knowledge, putting him in charge of establishing and running an infirmary for the coenobium.<sup>45</sup>

After the death of John the Prophet in 543 and the conclusion of the letter collection of the Old Men, Dorotheos' history is unclear. Based on the collection of his discourses and sayings it is clear that he continued to serve as a monastic authority and spiritual director in the region around Gaza, however, exactly where is hazy. Traditionally it has been accepted that Dorotheos left the Monastery of Seridos and established his own monastery. There are three pieces of evidence to support this interpretation. The first is the beginning of the title given to the *Discourses*: "Discourses from our holy father Dorotheos given to his disciples when he withdrew from that of Abba Seridos and, with God, established his own monastery..."<sup>46</sup> In addition, in one of the discourses Dorotheos makes the comment that "there was a brother in the coenobium

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<sup>44</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 62-3; Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 10.105; Barsanuphius and John, *Correspondence*, in *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*, ed. F. Neyt and P. de Angelis, 5 Vols. Sources chrétiennes 426, 427, 450, 451, 468 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997-2002).

<sup>45</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza. *Discourses and Letters*. In *Dorothee de Gaza: Œuvres spirituelles*, édité and translated by Lucien Regnault and J. de Préville, *Sources Chrétiennes* 92. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1963), Title.

before I withdrew from there.”<sup>47</sup> Finally, in one of his tales, John Moschos mentions the “Coenobium of Abba Dorotheos near to Gaza and Mauima.”<sup>48</sup>

Eric Wheeler in particular argued that Dorotheos did not found his own monastery but instead remained at the Monastery of Seridos. He cites two primary reasons for this stance. The first was that moving to a new monastery would have been against the monastic training that Dorotheos had received, that moving was a temptation of the devil.<sup>49</sup> As will be argued in the “Monastic Mobility” chapter, this is a misrepresentation of Palestinian monasticism. Moving between monasteries or establishing a new one was within the norm in Palestine for monks who had reached the spiritual mastery that Dorotheos is presented as having reached. Leaving the monastery to found his own would not have been a betrayal of his monastic training or the ascetic praxis presented in the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John.<sup>50</sup>

Wheeler’s second piece of evidence for Dorotheos staying was that reading his comment of “before I withdrew from there” has been taken too broadly. Wheeler instead saw it as meaning withdrawal specifically from the coenobium and into a cell as part of Dorotheos’ transition to the life of *hesychia*. While this is a possible reading, this does not seem to have been a standard way of describing the transition to the solitary life within the other contemporary Palestinian sources. In conjunction with the other evidence it seems to make more sense to understand the phrase to mean physical movement away from the Monastery of Seridos.

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<sup>47</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 7.80 Ἦν τις ἀδελφὸς ἐν τῷ κοινοβίῳ πρὸ τοῦ με ἀναχωρῆσαι ἐκεῖθεν.

<sup>48</sup> Moschos, Ch 166. Καὶ ἀπήνεγκεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ κοινόβιον τοῦ ἀββᾶ Δωροθέου, πλησίον Γάζης καὶ τοῦ Μαιουμά.

<sup>49</sup> Eric Wheeler trans., *Discourses and Sayings*, Cistercian Studies Series; No. 33 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1977) 60.

<sup>50</sup> In contrast to the comments made by Wheeler. See note above.

With this evidence in mind, I agree with the idea that Dorotheos eventually left the Monastery of Seridos and founded his own. In regard to the other monasteries of Palestine, Moschos always refers to them by the name of the founder or the traditional name given to them, rather than the current abbot or spiritual authority. In addition, as will be discussed in the “Forms of Authority” chapter below, unless Dorotheos became the abbot of the Monastery of Seridos—for which we do not possess any evidence—it would be odd for Moschos to refer to it by his name. Even with the Old Men, it is always the Monastery of Seridos, rather than Barsanuphius or John. Moschos then presented Dorotheos as having founded and being the first abbot of his own monastery.

As a final note regarding the source material and especially their limitations, the reader will undoubtedly notice that ascetic women will only occasionally appear along the fringes of the dissertation. This is not a purposeful choice that I have made, but instead a reflection of the sources themselves. Within the *Correspondence* and the *Lives* of Cyril, women—whether religious or lay—were by design restricted to the periphery of the texts, a reflection of the environment of Palestinian monasticism in which they were produced. Women were not allowed into the monasteries of the Judean Desert and Gaza as their presence could be too large of a distraction or temptation for its male monks.<sup>51</sup> Within the Judean Desert even young, beardless, men were restricted from the *lauras*, as they possessed too “feminine” (γυναικεῖος) a face which might also be a distraction for the other monks.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 219.05-25; Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 76.18; Barsanuphius and John, *Correspondence*, in *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*, ed. F. Neyt and P. de Angelis, 5 Vols. Sources chrétiennes 426, 427, 450, 451, 468 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997-2002), L. 354, 595, 661.

<sup>52</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 26.2, 50.41; Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 171.11.

By comparison, John Moschos' *Spiritual Meadow* more commonly features tales of ascetic women.<sup>53</sup> This inclusion can be connected to Moschos' overarching interest in displaying the presence of ascetic mastery and holiness in all Christians—lay or ascetic, men or women—throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

### **Historiography**

The overarching historiographical trend relevant to the dissertation which must be contended with is the conception of the Judean Desert and Gaza as distinct monastic regions.<sup>54</sup> A majority of scholars who have written on Palestinian monasticism have focused almost exclusively on the evidence of one these regions with little detailed comparison between the two. This historiographical trend, as might be imagined given its breadth, is not rooted to a singular reason, but instead is present throughout scholarship for a range of them. To that end the first four chapters each contend with a different justification for this separation between the monastic regions. While the chapters deal with these reasonings separately, they are in general, not mutually exclusive, but are instead intermingled within scholarship to create the consistent division between the monastic communities of the Judean Desert and Gaza.

We can witness this division in Derwas Chitty's 1966 magnum opus, *The Desert a City*.<sup>55</sup> Through his grand narrative, Chitty argued that at the outset of the fifth century following the condemnation of Origenism, along with the first destruction of Scetis in 407/8, a significant

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<sup>53</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 39, 60, 75, 127, 170, 179, 185, 204, 205, 206.

<sup>54</sup> This is by no means a complete recounting of the historiography of Palestinian monasticism in late antiquity. It is instead the most influential monographs that deal with or focus on the sixth century. The rest of the scholarship will be referenced in the relevant chapters.

<sup>55</sup> Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestine Monasticism Under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimirs Seminary Pr., 1966).

number of monks fled the region resulting in the creation of multiple monastic diasporas throughout the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>56</sup> A number of these monks ended up settling in Palestine with the region around Gaza being frequently mentioned.<sup>57</sup> This caused the primary monastic center to shift, according to Chitty, from Egypt to Palestine in the early to mid-fifth century.<sup>58</sup> It was also for this reason that Chitty emphasized the continued link between Egyptian monasticism and the region around Gaza.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time, Chitty suggested that the origins of Judean Desert monasticism were independent of Egypt.<sup>60</sup> Chariton—as the earliest known monk to the region—along with the monastic fathers Cyril discussed were not from nor spent time in Egypt. Despite the geographical proximity to one another, monasticism in the Judean Desert and Gaza developed independently. Chitty also pointed to the monastic use of the word *laura* (Λαύρα), which held a significant place in Palestine but is absent from earlier Egyptian records as further evidence of the independent development of the Judean Desert.<sup>61</sup> It was also in its Judean form that monasticism, according to Chitty, became firmly entrenched within the organization of the Church and entangled in its doctrinal disputes.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 58, 61, 71.

<sup>57</sup> John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, Library of Perennial Philosophy (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom, 2008), 11.

<sup>58</sup> Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 71; Bitton-Ashkelony, “Gazan Monasticism,” 16.

<sup>59</sup> Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 14, “Gaza and Eleutheropolis continue to be important centres of monastic life throughout our period, and retain their Egyptian links.” Pg. 74, “Contacts between the Gaza monks and these Egyptian circles were always close.”

<sup>60</sup> Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 15.

<sup>61</sup> Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 179.

This historical and supposedly continued connection between Egypt and Gaza in contrast to the Judean Desert has become engrained in the historiography of Palestinian monasticism.<sup>63</sup> Monasticism in Gaza is described as culturally dependent on, and in the orbit of, Scetis and Egypt rather than the Judean Desert and Palestine from its origins through the sixth century. In this manner, the monastic history of Gaza has become intertwined more with the history and traditions of Egyptian monasticism and the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (AP) than Palestine itself.<sup>64</sup>

At times this division is more related to the scope of a study than a stated, purposeful, separation. This can be seen especially in two monographs of the early 1990s which were the result of the archaeological surveys undertaken in the 1980s. The first is Yizhar Hirschfeld's 1992 publication *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine period*. Hirschfeld seeks to present a discussion of the broad practice of monasticism within the Judean Desert during late antiquity. In the process, he was also able to produce a typological classification of monasteries.<sup>65</sup> The monograph, built upon Hirschfeld's dissertation, uses the surge of new archaeological material discovered during the archaeological surveys of the Judean Desert led by Hirschfeld himself and others. As a result, Hirschfeld produced a comprehensive work encompassing Judean monasteries and the monks that inhabited them from an archaeological perspective.

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<sup>63</sup> See note 2 above.

<sup>64</sup> Samuel Rubenson, "The Egyptian Relations of Early Palestinian Monasticism." In *The Egyptian Relations of Early Palestinian Monasticism*, The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land (1995), 41; Jonathan L Zecher, *The Role of Death in the 'Ladder of Ascent' and the Greek Ascetic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Chrysavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert*.

<sup>65</sup> Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven: Yale university press, 1992), xv.

Hirschfeld works to create an overview of the monasteries themselves and a view of the physical reality that the monks of the Judean Desert inhabited in late antiquity. He begins with a breakdown of the types of monastic institutions, particularly the division between the *lauras* and *coenobia*, however also identifies the subtypes of monasteries located within abandoned fortresses and next to memorial churches. He identifies both sacred and secular architectural elements of *coenobia* and *lauras*. In particular, Hirschfeld highlights the variety of private prayer niches present within *lauras*, from roughly carved niches to professionally built and decorated chapels.<sup>66</sup> The extreme importance of cisterns and drainage canals within the desert is stressed through the care monks took to properly build and maintain these elements.<sup>67</sup> Through these processes, along with creating footpaths that connected monasteries to one another as well as the local cities, the monks of the Judean Desert visibly altered the desert itself.<sup>68</sup> He examines the process of their construction, concluding that in plan and quality of masonry resembles the mansions of contemporary elite families.<sup>69</sup> Donations, bequeaths, or personal wealth allowed monks to hire professional builders. Hirschfeld suggests that this quality of buildings was better than the living conditions of many lower class individuals and this served as part of the attraction of the monastic life.<sup>70</sup>

The daily life of the individuals that occupied these monasteries are also elucidated through an examination of their population, diets, schedules, and sources of livelihood. Although

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<sup>66</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 145.

<sup>67</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 148-49.

<sup>68</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 205.

<sup>69</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 68.

<sup>70</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 68.

ascetic, the wholesome diet of bread, vegetables, and dried fruits, when combined with the tranquility of the monastic life and the beneficial climate of the desert allowed many monks to live to an old age, as claimed in many of the contemporary hagiographies. In order to maintain this life, Hirschfeld points to donations as the main source of income, whether that be gifts, bequests, or the income coming with monks.<sup>71</sup> Their income was also assisted through the creation of crafts such as baskets or rope which could be sold to help offset the cost of daily needs. The relatively small population was also a positive for those that chose the monastic life within the Judean Desert. Hirschfeld estimates that at its zenith, the movement never saw more than three thousand spread across some sixty-five or more monasteries.<sup>72</sup>

There is a definite lack of theological and spiritual discussion, in regards to both the theological disputes that shaped Palestinian monasticism during late antiquity as well as the spiritual motivation for individuals to seek out a monastic life. However, Hirschfeld acknowledges this deficiency, pointing towards Chitty's work as a vital companion to understanding the period.<sup>73</sup>

Along with Hirschfeld, Joseph Patrich was another of the individuals that participated in the archaeological surveys of the Judean desert during 1981 and 1982. *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism*, published in 1995, is the result of Patrich's dissertation based on these surveys.<sup>74</sup> Rather than incorporate the available evidence into a generalization of the architecture

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<sup>71</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 102.

<sup>72</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 79.

<sup>73</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 2-3.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism. A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), xiii.



and life of the monks of the Judean Desert as Hirschfeld did, Patrich instead seeks to focus on the life and monasteries of Sabas and his contribution to Palestinian monasticism.

For Patrich, it was with Sabas that monasticism in the Judean Desert truly began to flourish as a unique system with regulated written rules and as the most important monastic center of Palestine.<sup>75</sup> Patrich provides an overview for each of the monasteries, both *lauras* and *coenobia*, that Sabas personally founded along with those of his direct disciples. Detailing the historical background, scholarly research, and archaeological remains for each structure, Patrich creates a thorough image of the Sabas' monastic network and their comparison to Egyptian and Cappadocian monasteries in size and layout.

Shifting to Sabas as an abbot and legislator, Patrich significantly departs from John Binns' analysis of Sabas.<sup>76</sup> For Patrich, Sabas' authority was intimately connected to his personality and status as a holy man, in the same vein as Euthymios.<sup>77</sup> Under Sabas, the roles of spiritual teacher and monastic administrator remained held by a single individual. His personal presence remained important as he continued to visit and care for the monasteries that he had established.<sup>78</sup> It was only with Sabas' successors that a clear break between abbot the administrator and the holy man as spiritual teacher occurred.<sup>79</sup> Patrich argues that more than any other Palestinian monk in late antiquity, Sabas contributed to the spread and reinvigoration of

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<sup>75</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 6-7. "But the Judean Desert, not the region of Gaza, became the most important monastic center in Palestine."

<sup>76</sup> See Below. John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-631* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 162.

<sup>77</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 169.

<sup>78</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 170.

<sup>79</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 169.

lauritic monasticism.<sup>80</sup> While Euthymios and Sabas are generally cited as the two central monastic leaders, Sabas' lauritic model was actually closer to that of Gerasimus than Euthymios or Chariton's Pharan.<sup>81</sup> That said, Sabas contributed a unique form of the laura, differing from Gerasimus by the Great Laura being a completely anchoritic group, with no coenobia within its bounds. Patrich also highlights the uniqueness of Sabas creating a rule for lauras. In contrast to the rules of Pachomius, Basil, or Benedict all of which were written for coenobia, Sabas is the only evidence of a written rule for lauritic monasticism.<sup>82</sup> However, even though Sabas served as archimandrite of the desert monasteries, he only maintained these rules for the monasteries that he himself founded.<sup>83</sup>

Through Sabas' career, Patrich also stresses the influence that the monastic movement had exerted upon the ecclesiastical system. The election of Sabas and Theodoios, both desert monks, in approximately 494 as archimandrites largely due to the insistence of monks expresses the power that monks could wield. These same individuals stood with, and lent their authority to, the Patriarch John in 516 as he confirmed the orthodoxy of Chalcedon before a multitude in

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<sup>80</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 203.

<sup>81</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 228.

<sup>82</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 255.

<sup>83</sup> In late antique Palestine the archimandrite was an official ecclesiastical position selected by the patriarch of Jerusalem to serve as head of the monasteries. With the selection of Sabas and Theodosios in 494 the position was divided between head of the coenobia and lauras. It was also during the tenure of Sabas and Theodosios that the position came to wield significantly more influence due to the renown of the two monks. See Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), 14-17; Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism. A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 9; Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "Monastic Leadership and Municipal Tensions in Fifth-Sixth Century Palestine: The Cases of the Judean Desert and Gaza," *Annali di Storia dell'esegesi* 23/2 (2006), 420.

Jerusalem.<sup>84</sup> Patrich acknowledges this intersection with perhaps the more salient example of Sabas serving as an emissary to the emperor on behalf of the patriarch of Jerusalem, just as Chitty had previously done. Both in the 511 mission to Anastasius and the 531 mission to Justinian, Sabas was personally chosen to request imperial assistance not only for his own monastic community, but the ecclesiastical and monastic community of Palestine on the whole.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the name of John Binns' 1994 monograph, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-63*, it is principally a study of the writings of Cyril of Scythopolis and the monastic leaders of the Judean Desert, Euthymios (d. 473) and Sabas (d. 532). Binns seeks to create an image of monasticism in the Judean Desert under Euthymios and Sabas and how this desert society fit within the ecclesiastical and political systems of the era.

Binns details the unique environment of the Judean Desert, and how this area produced the particularities of the local monasticism. Jerusalem is the key component for the uniqueness of the Palestinian monastic experience according to Binns. Pilgrimage and monasticism both developed in Palestinian society at the same time in the early fourth century.<sup>86</sup> Both groups, which in many instances were merged as exemplified by Euthymios, came to Palestine to worship and commune with the holy places. Due to this, Binns argues that that entire purpose of being a monk in the Judean Desert was to live in close proximity to the holy places.<sup>87</sup> It was also for this reason that the monks and church of Jerusalem adopted a Chalcedonian stance in contrast to many of the other neighboring Monophysite regions. Palestinian monks needed to stay in

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<sup>84</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 307-8.

<sup>85</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 311.

<sup>86</sup> Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors*, 84.

<sup>87</sup> Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors*, 197.

communion with the Patriarch as he remained in control of the holy places throughout the period so to continue to maintain access to them, the Judean monks must agree with his theological position.

Within the monasteries themselves Binns identifies a division between the style of leadership that Euthymios and Sabas favored. He describes Euthymios as a charismatic spiritual teacher whose personal connection and teaching were central to his disciples.<sup>88</sup> By contrast, Sabas was a “builder,” whose personal contact and ascetic teachings were not a significant aspect of the monastic life in his monasteries.<sup>89</sup> Under Sabas, monasticism in the Judean Desert became increasingly focused on its place in ecclesiastical hierarchy and its doctrinal position in contrast to inner spiritual development.

As might be noticed, the 1960s through 1990s were dominated by studies of the Judean Desert. The last two decades have witnessed a rise in the number of monographs dealing with the Christian and monastic communities around Gaza. Jennifer Hevelone-Harper’s 2005 *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* focuses on *The Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John and their community at Tawatha.<sup>90</sup> In 2004 Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky have jointly produced an edited volume, *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* as well as a monograph in 2006, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, both of which focused on the region of Gaza.<sup>91</sup> David Mezynski’s 2012 doctoral dissertation, “The Effects of

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<sup>88</sup> Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors*, 160.

<sup>89</sup> Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors*, 162.

<sup>90</sup> Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

<sup>91</sup> Bruria Bitton-Ashkelony, and Arie Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza* (Boston: Brill, 2006); Bruria Bitton-Ashkelony and Arie Kofsky, eds. *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*. *Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture*, v. 3. (Boston: Brill, 2004).

the Origenist Controversy on the Pastoral Theology of Barsanuphius and John,” as the name suggests also focuses on the *Correspondence* of the Old Men of Gaza.

Jennifer Hevelone-Harper’s 2005 *Disciples of the Desert* is part of the more recent wave of scholarship which has focused on the region and literature of Gaza. Hevelone-Harper describes the monograph as the “first book-length study to examine the entire collection [of Barsanuphius and John’s letters] in its social context.”<sup>92</sup> In particular the focus is on the establishment and implementation of spiritual authority in the Monastery of Seridos and the surrounding Christian communities as expressed in the *Correspondence*. While the study focuses specifically on the works of Barsanuphius and John, Hevelone-Harper also emphasizes the cultural variations of the region of Gaza from the Judean Desert: “South of Jerusalem and the Judean Desert, monasticism had another orientation. Asceticism in the region of Gaza was rooted in the deserts of Egypt.”

Hevelone-Harper stresses the unique nature of the structure of authority at the Monastery of Seridos. The shared authority between Barsanuphius, John, and Seridos, according to Hevelone-Harper, set the monastery apart from most others in Egypt and Palestine especially due to the Old Men’s continued association with the central coenobium.<sup>93</sup> Conversely, Seridos’ submission to the Old Men as a disciple served to strengthen his own authority as abbot due to his close connection with the spiritual directors.

The case study of Dorotheos in the third chapter provides an intriguing examination of an individual’s development from a novitiate to a spiritual authority in late antique monasticism. Hevelone-Harper is able to bring together both the letters of the *Correspondence* between

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<sup>92</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, X.

<sup>93</sup> This notion will be contested below in chapter 3.

Dorotheos and the Old Men and Dorotheos' own writings to detail his experiences as a monk. It reveals the struggles between the idealized ascetic desire to give up all connections of the lay world and the needed reality of that connection in the form of Dorotheos being asked to run the monastery's infirmary. The chapter also highlights the importance of the master-disciple relationship as part of the transfer of spiritual authority from one generation to the next.

The fourth and fifth chapters turn attention to the Old Men's interaction with lay Christians, bishops, and civil authorities. While rooted in the monastery, the authority of the Old Men extended beyond its walls with Christians of all varieties seeking the wisdom and advice of the spiritual directors on a plethora of topics. Hevelone-Harper also emphasizes Barsanuphius' reluctance to become directly involved ecclesiastical affairs, especially revealed in the picking of bishops.<sup>94</sup> Hevelone-Harper ends the monograph with a chapter on the death of Seridos and John the Prophet and the impermanent nature of the authority which the earlier chapters had detailed. At the core of the authority wielded by both the Old Men of Gaza as spiritual directors and Seridos as abbot was, according to Hevelone-Harper, personal spiritual charisma. This reveals the delicate nature of monasteries in late antiquity.

In 2006 Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky jointly published *The Monastic School of Gaza*. The monograph is described as seeking to "frame the historical development of this community and to depict and analyze the spiritual and intellectual context represented in the sources of what may be termed the monastic school of Gaza."<sup>95</sup> Chronologically the monograph begins with Hilarion in the early fourth century and ends with the disappearance of monasticism in Gaza from the historical record following the Muslim conquest of the region in the early

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<sup>94</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 109-110.

<sup>95</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 3.

seventh century. In particular, the monograph is focused around the figures of Peter the Iberian and then Barsanuphius and John. In their historical overview Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky maintain the division of Gaza and the Judean Desert based along the cultural reliance and orientation earlier described by Chitty and Binns: “While Judean Desert monasticism in late antiquity grew to a large extent around the holy places, looking to Jerusalem as the holy city, this was not the case with Gaza monasticism. As reflected in the *Life of Hilarion*—the first Palestinian monk from the Gaza region known to us—Gaza monasticism throughout this period is marked by the influence of Egyptian Monasticism.”<sup>96</sup>

In the final chapter Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky make the speculative argument that Barsanuphius, John, and possibly Dorotheos were all “crypto-Monophysites.”<sup>97</sup> Since all three spiritual directors, or at least the editors of their works, were silent on the topic the argument is made on two pieces of related information. The first was that the region of Gaza had established non-Chalcedonian connections in the previous century. The presence of Peter the Iberian and Severus of Antioch established the likelihood that there was a non-Chalcedonian population in the region in the later fifth and possibly early sixth centuries. In addition, the centrality of Abba Isaiah—himself identified as non-Chalcedonian—to the ascetic ideals of the Old Men further connect them to a non-Chalcedonian leaning. Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky conclude that these connections and their avoidance of theological discussion suggest an acceptance of non-Chalcedonian doctrine.

In his 2012 doctoral dissertation Mezynski argues, based primarily on their understanding of asceticism and their denunciation of Origenism that Barsanuphius and John were accepting of,

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<sup>96</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 215.

or at least sympathetic towards, non-Chalcedonian theology. According to Mezynski the theological stances of the Old Men can be ascertained based on their ascetic praxis and how the monastic life was envisioned within the *Correspondence*. Based on the Old Men's emphasis on humility, obedience, and especially their adoption of *hesychia* Mezynski argues that we can witness the spiritualization of the holy man in such a way that would not be possible in diphysite Christology.<sup>98</sup> Despite their non-Chalcedonian leanings, Mezynski argues that Barsanuphius and John were not condemned or fully identified as heretics in posterity because of their emphasis on the "common foundation" of asceticism and monasticism between both factions rather than stressing the ideological differences.<sup>99</sup>

This can be related to the distinction between Barsanuphius and John and Sabas in particular as representative of different models of spiritual directors. These models are labeled as mediator and shepherd. The distinction is based around Mezynski's reading of Cyril in which he views Sabas as someone "who seemingly did not encourage the monks of his community to develop their interior spiritual lives," but instead "acted as an intercessor between God and his foundations."<sup>100</sup> By contrast the Old Men of Gaza, as shepherds "who did encourage ascetic struggle, brought their disciples to God in the company of the saints."<sup>101</sup>

In contrast to the perspectives presented in these monographs, throughout the dissertation I stress the similarities and continuities which existed in the literature of the monastic

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<sup>98</sup> David Mezynski, "The Effects of the Origenist Controversy on the Pastoral Theology of Barsanuphius and John," (PhD Diss., Fordham University, 2012), 219.

<sup>99</sup> Mezynski, "The Effects of the Origenist Controversy," 223-24.

<sup>100</sup> Mezynski, "The Effects of the Origenist Controversy," 220. This reading will be contested below in chapter two.

<sup>101</sup> Mezynski, "The Effects of the Origenist Controversy," 220.



communities of the Judean Desert and Gaza throughout the sixth century. This is not to say that the Judean Desert and Gaza did not have different origins, or that Egyptian monasticism did not play an important role in the early development of the regions, but instead that by the sixth century, despite these variations we do witness a unification, especially when examining the ascetic praxis and monastic institutions expressed in the literature. It is in this way that I seek to situate myself within the historical debate, not to destroy or dismantle all previous notions or to suggest they have been utterly wrong, but instead to suggest a different perspective to examine and understand the evidence.

### **Chapters overview**

The first chapter, “Monastic Legacies and Local Connections,” explores the place of the heritage of Egyptian monasticism and the geographic origins of monks in the conception and construction of the monastic communities of sixth-century Palestine. Scholarship has consistently presented the monastic regions of the Judean Desert and Gaza as divergent, with Gaza firmly in the orbit of the history of Egyptian—particularly Scetis—monasticism. An examination of the use of the wisdom of the monastic fathers in the form of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* reveals, however, that this wisdom was not passed along unchanged. It had to be interpreted and taught by local spiritual directors. The legacy of Egyptian monasticism was incorporated into Palestinian monasticism rather than *vice versa*. The same can be said in regard to the homelands of Palestinian monks. The monastic communities of Palestine were made up of individuals with origins throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. From both a personal and spiritual perspective the process of becoming a monk in Palestine was one of adopting the mantle of the foreigner and reemerging as a monk of the region itself.

In the second chapter, “The Way to Perfection,” I focus on the idealized ascetic praxes and monastic way of life emphasized by the Palestinian authors as required for the attainment of virtues and climbing closer towards spiritual perfection. Through describing this process, the chapter grapples with two historiographic trends. The first is the overarching depiction of the Judean Desert and Gaza as divorced monastic regions. In connection with this, the second historiographical issue that the chapter argues against is the contention that by the sixth century monasticism in the Judean Desert was largely uninterested in inner spiritual development, in favor of imperial orthodoxy and integration into episcopal hierarchy. The chapter displays the ubiquitous and continued importance of the individual monk and their spiritual progress in the monastic literature of both the Judean Desert and Gaza. From the viewpoint of the ascetic process, the monastic communities of Palestine can be spoken of as a conjoined entity.

Chapter three, “Forms of Authority,” builds on the arguments of the previous chapter regarding the place of inner spiritual development in Judean Desert monasticism by examining why these constructions have been produced. By analyzing the different authoritative positions key monastic figures held, the chapter reveals that the misrepresentation of the Judean Desert can be connected to the distinctions between spiritual and administrative roles within the monastery. The two monastic fathers of the Judean Desert most often examined, Euthymios and Sabas, both served as *hegoumenoi* (abbots) of their respective monasteries. This position required additional administrative duties which placed them in more direct and frequent communication with the episcopal and imperial worlds which Cyril, as their hagiographer, included in their *Lives*. In contrast, Barsanuphius and John the Prophet only served as spiritual directors. When compared with Judean monastic figures such as John the Hesychast who likewise only served as spiritual

directors, a similar image appears throughout both regions. One in which personal asceticism and spiritual development remained a vital component of the monastic life.

The fourth chapter, “Theology and the Monastic Life,” shifts to the role that theological speculation and doctrinal debates were expected to serve in the monastic life of Palestine. While the literature reveals varied emphasis on the importance of doctrinal loyalty, the Palestinian sources are in agreement that theological speculation was not a required activity for the monk. Concerns over doctrine should not distract a monk from their ascetic praxes nor hinder their spiritual progress. In addition, the chapter reveals the poignant reminder that all sides of the doctrinal debates of the sixth century used a similar rhetorical strategy of condemnation and salvation. For many monks, it was not clear which doctrinal camp was the ‘correct’ option. To this end, the Palestinian sources emphasized God’s intervention through miracles and prayer to reveal the orthodox and heretics, rather than rhetorical strategy.

The final chapter, “Monastic Mobility in Palestine,” highlights the prevalence and importance of varied forms of movement for asceticism in sixth-century Palestine. This stands in contrast to the traditional image of the monk as turning away from the secular world and withdrawing to the confines of a solitary monastery for the remainder of their life. The chapter underlines the practices of pilgrimage, *xeneitia*, and *hesychia* as fundamental for the formation of an ascetic existence which all required and encouraged monks to become mobile. Such mobility provided monks with access to conduits of holiness, fonts of ascetic wisdom, and the stillness and solitude needed for spiritual advancement. The ability of a monk to travel reveals the variations present in Palestinian monasticism and the continued focus on the individual monk and their spiritual advancement.

## Chapter 1. Monastic Legacies and Palestinian Communities

As was discussed in the introduction, the standard scholarly reading has been to view monasticism in Gaza as culturally dependent on Egypt. A significant contributing factor of this has been the geographic origins of many of the known monks in Gaza. To gain a better understanding of these origins as well as the origins of Palestinian monasticism as a whole, this chapter will examine these individuals and how their origins impacted community formation in Palestine. The chapter argues that while Gaza and the Judean Desert did have different origins—as far as the sources allow us to ascertain—the origins of an individual mattered less than their place within the local monastic communities. Whether fleeing renown as a holy man, theological controversy, a bishopric, or being drawn by Palestine’s alluring status as the holy land, a region in which the biblical past could vividly manifest itself in the present<sup>1</sup>, a multitude of monks—and pilgrims turned monks—from throughout the Mediterranean world came to the region. From its outset, monasticism in Palestine was comprised of foreigners who came together to form an independent monastic community, influenced by elements of Egyptian, Syrian, and Cappadocian traditions, but not perpetually attached to them.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the sixth century contemporary account of the Piacenza Pilgrim. Piacenza Pilgrim, “Antonini Placentini Itinerarium,” in *Itineraria et alia geographica*, CCSL 175, edited by P. Geyer, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), 12; Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism. A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 7.

### Egyptian Founding Figures in Gaza<sup>3</sup>

When examining the available sources concerning the origins of monasticism around Gaza, it is difficult to ignore the presence of Egyptian figures, or at least individuals who claimed to have received their monastic formation in Egypt.<sup>4</sup> If Jerome can be believed, Hilarion first brought monasticism to the region.<sup>5</sup> He was a native of Palestine, born in Tawatha which was located a few miles south-west of Gaza. He was sent to study grammar in Alexandria and it was here that he heard of Antony. Hilarion decided to leave the city to seek out Antony in the desert and served as his disciple for two months, learning his way of life, before returning to Tawatha when he was fifteen. He sold off his now deceased parents' property and wandered the wilderness outside of Maiuma before retiring to a cell around 308.<sup>6</sup>

Silvanus was also a native to Palestine who, according to Sozomen, spent time in Egypt.<sup>7</sup> He served as an abbot for a community of twelve monks at Scetis before moving to Rhaithou, near Sinai, around 380.<sup>8</sup> Eventually Silvanus and his disciples moved to Gaza, settling in the wadi

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<sup>3</sup> The section's focus on Egyptian figures does not deny the importance of non-Egyptian figures, particularly Peter the Iberian or Severus of Antioch. Instead, the focus on Egyptian figures is to deal with the question of the connection between Gaza and Egypt.

<sup>4</sup> Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony & Aryeh Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 6-46.

<sup>5</sup> Jerome's goal with his life of Hilarion seems to have been to create a monastic figure who surpassed Antony. In addition, his disputes with John, Bishop of Jerusalem, might have influenced his decision to place the origins of monasticism in Palestine near to Gaza. See Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis*, ed. A. Bastiaensen, in *Vita di Martino, Vita di Ilarione, In memoria di Paola* (Milan, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI.32. Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestine Monasticism Under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimirs Seminary Pr., 1966), 71.

near to Gerar.<sup>9</sup> He died at some point before 414 and was succeeded by Zacharias. Zeno the Prophet was also one of Silvanus' disciples who likewise moved with him from Scetis to Sinai and finally to Palestine.<sup>10</sup>

The knowledge and prominence of several of these figures, especially Silvanus and his disciples, comes to us through the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (AP). As will be discussed below, the sayings of the desert fathers are frequently cited throughout the letters of Barsanuphius and John as well as the works of Dorotheos. Scholars have suggested that the popularity and influence of the AP in the region was due to it actually being written and codified in Palestine itself.<sup>11</sup> Chitty and Lucien Regnault suggested that the movement of Silvanus and his disciples in particular could be likely candidates given the presence of sayings from this circle of monks in the alphabetical collection.<sup>12</sup> Silvanus and three of his disciples are in the alphabetical collection, amounting to twenty-six total sayings. Twelve sayings are attributed to Silvanus, five to Mark; eight to Zeno; and one to Netras.

Abba Isaiah began his monastic life in an Egyptian coenobium before transitioning to Scetis.<sup>13</sup> He then fled the region due to his rising popularity and came to Palestine sometime between the councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), where he settled near to

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<sup>9</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI.32. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 71-74.

<sup>10</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 18-19; Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1993), 9-17; Chitty, *Desert a City*, 67. Derwas Chitty, "The Books of the Old Men," *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1) (1974): 20. Rubenson, "The Egyptian Relations of Early Palestinian Monasticism," in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, eds. Anthony O'Mahony, Göran Gunner, Kevork Hintlian (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995): 43.

<sup>12</sup> Chitty, "Book of old men," 16-17; Chitty, *Desert a City*, 71-3; Regnault, "Les Transmission des Apophtegems". Gould, *The Desert Fathers*, 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 73.

Eleutheropolis. Around 458 he shifted to a cell at Beit Dallatha, a few miles from Tawatha where he would remain until his death in 489. It was here that he established a combined *laura* before becoming a hesychast and adopting a life of full enclosure, only communicating with a single disciple—Peter the Egyptian—and serving as a spiritual master for the monastery. This model of monastery and *hesychia* would later be adopted by Barsanuphius and John.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Barsanuphius appears to have been from Egypt as well.<sup>15</sup> An Egyptian monk came to see Barsanuphius and wrote him a letter in “Egyptian” (αἰγυπτιστὶ) and the compiler of the letters mentions that the Old Man could read it because he was also Egyptian, while Seridos could not.<sup>16</sup>

The presence of individuals who received their monastic formation in Egypt cannot be denied. The question that does remain, however, is the impact that this legacy had on monasticism in Gaza and whether its presence meant a perpetual link between the two regions at the expense of connections within Palestine itself.

It is also worth mentioning that we do have references to monastic figures who were not from Egypt within the communities of Gaza. Peter the Iberian, originally named Nabarnugios, was a prince and political hostage of Theodosios II raised in Constantinople. He adopted an ascetic lifestyle and at the age of twenty set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem along with his companion John the Eunuch. After initially being admitted into the male monastery of Melania the Younger on the Mount of Olives, Peter founded his own monastery in the city and then

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<sup>14</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 21; Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 73.

<sup>15</sup> Barsanuphius and John, *Correspondence*, in *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*, ed. F. Neyt and P. de Angelis, 5 Vols. Sources chrétiennes 426, 427, 450, 451, 468 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997-2002), L. 55. Barsanuphius and John say very little about themselves throughout the collection of letters.

<sup>16</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 55. Γέρων τις Αιγύπτιος ἐλθὼν οἰκῆσαι ἐν τῷ Μοναστηρίῳ ἔνθα οἱ Πατέρες ἦσαν, γράμμασιν ἐχρήσατο αἰγυπτιστὶ γεγραμμένοις πρὸς τὸν μέγαν Γέροντα (ἦν γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς Αἰγύπτιος).

transitioned to the monastery of Irenion near to Maiuma.<sup>17</sup> Following the Council of Chalcedon (451) Peter was made bishop of Maiuma by the non-Chalcedonian bishop of Jerusalem Theodosios and became an important non-Chalcedonian leader in his own right.<sup>18</sup>

Similar to Peter—and as with so many other Palestinian monks—Severus of Antioch first arrived in the region as a pilgrim. After visiting Jerusalem, Severus continued to Maiuma and Peter the Iberian's monastery where he himself became a monk in the last decade of the fifth century. After spending some time in the coenobium, Severus attempted to shift the anchoritic life near to Elutheropolis, but was too harsh in his ascetic practice and severely weakened himself. After a period of recovery, Severus transferred to the Laura of Maiuma until around 500 when he purchased and headed a monastery of his own.<sup>19</sup> It was during this period that Severus became a leading figure of the non-Chalcedonian movement in Palestine until 508, when a Chalcedonian monk named Nephalius, with the support of the patriarch Elias, expelled non-Chalcedonian monks—including Severus—from their monasteries around Gaza.<sup>20</sup> At this point Severus went to Constantinople to seek assistance for the non-Chalcedonian cause and once there became increasingly involved the ecclesiastical and imperial politics culminating in his appointment as bishop of Antioch in 512. Finally, Dorotheos grew up in, or at least around, Antioch before coming to Gaza and entering into the Monastery of Seridos.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> For more on this stage of his life see Chapter Four below.

<sup>19</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *Monastic School of Gaza*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *Monastic School of Gaza*, 35.

<sup>21</sup> The details of Dorotheos' life prior to entering the Monastery of Seridos are unfortunately very limited. Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 42.



While chronologically outside the scope of the dissertation, it is worthwhile to mention these individuals so as to provide a corrective to the idea that all monks in Gaza were native born or from Egypt. As will be seen in the next section, we possess a much better image of the geographic origins of the monks of the Judean Desert in the sixth century in comparison to Gaza. However, this is a product and limitation of the sources themselves. Cyril and John Moschos were interested in detailing the origins of the monks mentioned in their works. By contrast, the *Correspondence* and Dorotheos preferred to maintain anonymity. Most monks encountered in their texts are simply referred to as brother or father rather than given a name let alone a place of origin. The importance was placed upon the wisdom that the Old Men of Gaza and Dorotheos wanted to convey and the spiritual stage the monk was at rather than detailed specifics of their life. The sources of Gaza have, unintentionally, placed a fog over the monks of the region. We can only see as much as the sources themselves allow us to. It is for this reason we should be more willing utilize the sources of the Judean Desert, and *vice versa*, to tentatively fill in the gaps in our understanding and gain a better understanding of Palestine as a monastic region.

### **Judean Desert Origins and Population**

Shifting to the region of the Judean Desert, it is important to note that a majority of the monastic leaders of the Judean Desert were not natives to Palestine either. Most notably both Euthymios and Sabas were non-natives, with Euthymios growing up in Armenia and Sabas in Cappadocia.<sup>22</sup> In fact, all seven of the monastic figures whose lives Cyril recorded were not from any part of Palestine: Theognius and Theodosios were also from Cappadocia, John the Hesychast was from Armenia, Cyriacus from Corinth, and finally Abraamius was from Phoenicia

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<sup>22</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 198.

Libanensis. Chariton was not a native of Palestine either, but originally from Iconium in Lycaonia. Finally, Gerasimus was born in Lycia.<sup>23</sup> When examining our known authors, only Cyril was born in a Palestinian province, being raised in Scythopolis the capital of *Palestina II*. John Moschos and his disciple Sophronios were from Cilicia.<sup>24</sup>

Moving beyond our authors and the central monastic figures, when all the references to foreign monks living in the Judean Desert are examined together the cosmopolitan nature of the region is further emphasized. A survey was undertaken, collecting all references to foreign monks who had settled in the Judean Desert within the regions central sixth-century texts. From the works of Cyril, Moschos, and the *Vita* of Chariton a representative sample of seventy-seven monks were gathered whose home province is mentioned or can be ascertained.<sup>25</sup> Fifty-five of these references are from Cyril, twenty-one from Moschos, and one from Chariton's *Vita*. These seventy-seven individuals were from at least nineteen different provinces, with no one province having the majority.<sup>26</sup> Due to ambiguity in the sources and for the sake of readability, on the following charts I have chosen to list divided provinces under a single name. In particular, this is the case for Armenia, Cappadocia, Cilicia, Palestine, and Phoenice.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 44.20.

<sup>24</sup> Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2014), 44.

<sup>25</sup> For reference, Hirschfeld estimated that during late antiquity there were never more than 3,000 monks residing within the Judean Desert, with a more exact estimation of 2,200 monks living within monasteries. Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 78-79.

<sup>26</sup> I say at least because for a number of monks, a province of origin is given without specifics. So that we are told that a number of monks were from Cilicia, however, we do not know if they were from Cilicia I or II.

<sup>27</sup> Here and on the chart, Palestine refers to individuals from either Palestine II or III.

The diversity of the monastic population can clearly be seen by the fact that the largest percentage of monks only amounted to 18%, or 14 individuals, from the Armenian provinces.<sup>28</sup> Following Armenia, the next highest percentage of monks were from the Cappadocian provinces and amounted to 13% or 10 individuals. The provinces of Cilicia are close behind in third with 12% or 9 individuals. The other 57% of monks are then relatively evenly distributed between the remaining sixteen provinces, all in the east with the exception of Rome. The accompanying flow map (figure 2) provides a visual representation of the diversity of the monks of the Judean Desert.

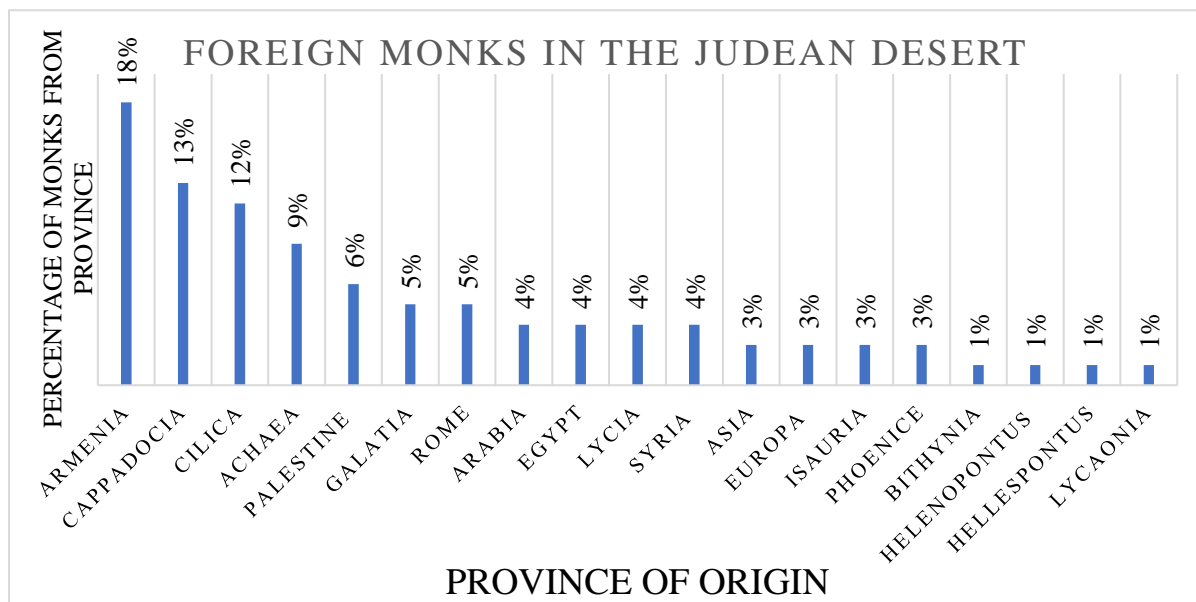


Figure 1. Provinces of origin for the monks of the Judean Desert.

<sup>28</sup> I am rounding to the nearest whole percent for readability.

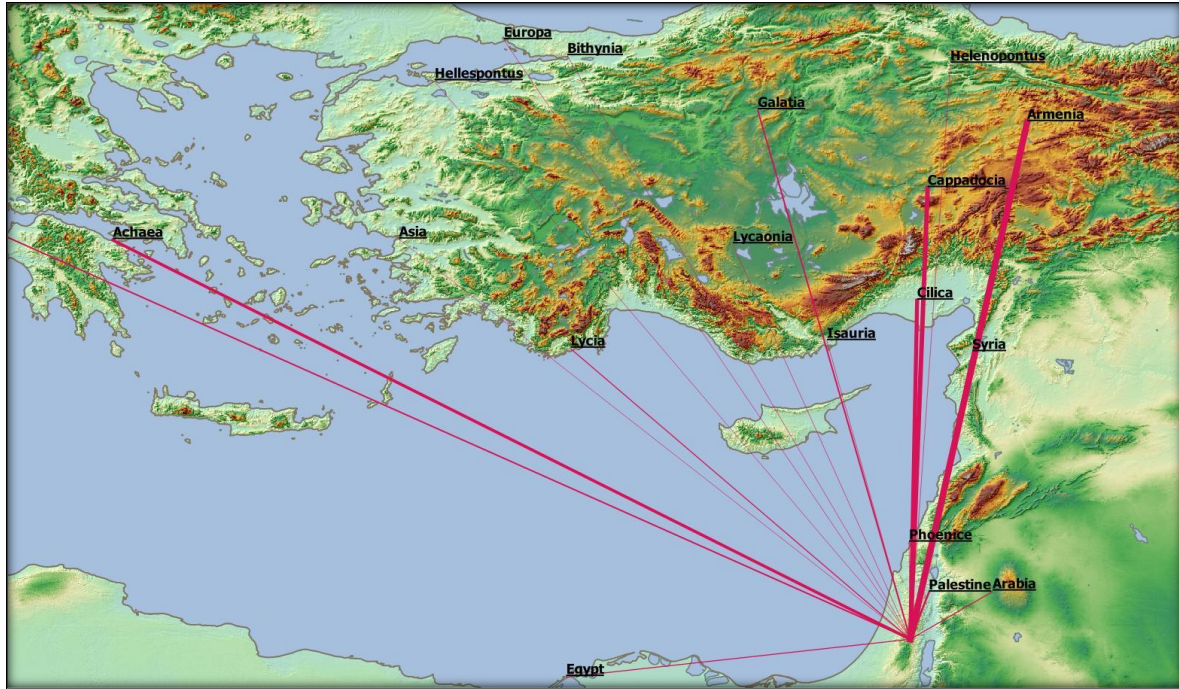


Figure 2. Flow map displaying the provinces of origin for the monks of the Judean Desert.

The presence of Armenia, Cappadocia, and Cilicia as the provinces with the highest percentage of monks poses an interesting dilemma as these provinces are directly related to either the author or central figures of the sources. John Moschos was from Aegae in Cilicia II and does show an interest in other monks from his home province throughout the *Meadow*, in addition to traveling through the region himself.<sup>29</sup> Of the nine monks from Cilicia we have references for—two of which are Moschos and Sophoronios themselves—only one reference was gained from Cyril’s corpus. While Cyril himself was not from either Armenia or Cappadocia, as mentioned above Euthymios was from the former and Sabas the latter. Did Cyril and the individuals he talked with pay greater attention to, or have a greater desire to mention, monks from the regions that the elders were from? Did monks from these regions more

<sup>29</sup> Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 44. Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, In *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Graeca, Vol. 87:3, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1865), Chs 51, 80.

frequently settle in the monasteries of the Judean Desert specifically because of the legacy of Euthymios and Sabas? Or were monks from these three regions more likely to wander to and resettle in Palestine?

On the one hand we do have references which suggest that individuals sought out others from their home provinces when first arriving in Palestine. Cyril mentions that when Sabas came to Jerusalem he was received by a Cappadocian elder who was a monk at the monastery of Passarion.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, when Cyriacus first came to the Laura of Euthymios, he was received by two Corinthian brothers—Cyriacus was from Corinth—whom he knew before being presented before Euthymios.<sup>31</sup> Near Gaza, a newly arrived Egyptian monk specifically sought out Barsanuphius due to his Egyptian heritage.<sup>32</sup> The sizeable Armenian population of monks at the Great Laura could also possibly have been due to this tendency.

On the other hand, if this was the case on a large scale throughout Palestine, then we should expect to see monasteries with regional majorities. It should be Euthymios' laura with a large Armenian population rather than Sabas' monastery. This is something which the sources do not confirm. Euthymios' first three disciples—the brothers Cosmas, Chrysippis, and Gabrieli—were of “Cappadocian origin and Syrian rearing.”<sup>33</sup> According to Cyril, of Euthymios' first eleven disciples none were natives of the first province of Palestine and only

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<sup>30</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas*, in *Kyriillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 90.20.

<sup>31</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, in *Kyriillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 224.20.

<sup>32</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 55.

<sup>33</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymios*, in *Kyriillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 25.15-20. τρεῖς ἀδελφοὺς σαρκικοὺς ἐκ μὲν τῆς Καππαδοκῶν χώρας ὁρμωμένους, ἐν δὲ τῇ Συρίᾳ ἀνατραφέντας.

three were from Armenia. In addition to the brothers, Euthymios accepted Domnus who was from Antioch as well as another set of three brothers—Stephen, Andrew, and Gaianus—who were from his hometown of Melitene in Armenia.<sup>34</sup> Finally he accepted three monks—John the priest, Thalassius, and Anatolius—from Raithou near Sinai and Cyriôn from Tiberias in *Palestina II*. Beyond his first disciples, Cyril mentions several non-native monks at Euthymios' laura. Auxentius, a willful monk who refused Euthymios' command to become the monastery's muleteer, cited his ignorance of the surrounding area and languages as one of his reasons for not wanting to leave the monastery.<sup>35</sup> Martyrius and Elias—both future patriarchs of Jerusalem—are also worth mentioning. Martyrius was originally from Cappadocia and Elias Arabia, however, both were anchorites at Nitria before becoming Euthymios' disciples.<sup>36</sup>

Sabas likewise had an assortment of monks. He accepted Jeremias and his two disciples—Peter and Paul—from Armenia.<sup>37</sup> It seems that the Armenian population at the Great Laura grew to such an extent that Sabas provided them with a cave with a small oratory where they were allowed to perform the psalmody on their own in Armenian and were later given the 'church built by God' due to their increased population when he built a larger church for the rest of the monks.<sup>38</sup> Cyril also mentions two brothers from Isauria—Theodulus and Gelasius—who

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<sup>34</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 26.5-10.

<sup>35</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 29.10-15.

<sup>36</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 50.20.

<sup>37</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 105.5.

<sup>38</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas* 105.10, 117.10. At least until some of the Armenian monks tried to add Peter the Fuller's 'who was crucified for us' addition to the Trisagion. Cyril reported that Sabas then required them to recite in Greek with the other monks. See Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 118.

helped Sabas build the new church.<sup>39</sup> John the Egyptian served as the abbot of Choziba before becoming bishop of Caesarea Maritima during Sabas' lifetime.<sup>40</sup>

The wide range of home provinces of monks in Moschos' original Palestinian monastery of Theodosios reveals the continued metropolitan nature of Palestinian monasticism into the later sixth century. Within this sole monastery, Moschos mentions Conon from Cilicia, Patrick from Sebaste in Armenia, George from Cappadocia, Julian was an Arab, Peter from Pontus, Paul from Rome, and Christopher a "Roman by race."<sup>41</sup> The monasteries of the Judean Desert were made up of a variety of monks without—as far as our sources reveal—a regional bias.

In addition, none of the mentioned monasteries featured a pattern of electing abbots based on their province of origin. Following the deaths of Euthymios and Sabas, their monasteries continued to be run by various foreigners. While Euthymios' initial successor was from Jericho, the following three abbots were not from the region. Symeonius who served as abbot between 511 and 513/4 was from Apamea in Syria.<sup>42</sup> His successor, Stephen who was Arab, was abbot until 534.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Thomas, who was also from Apamea, served next until 542/3.<sup>44</sup>

Sabas' monasteries followed similar pattern. Sabas made John, who was Greek, the superior of the New Laura after he retook control over it.<sup>45</sup> After John died, Paul, who was

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<sup>39</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 117.

<sup>40</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 134.20, 162.24.

<sup>41</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Chs 22, 92, 95, 96, 100, 101, 105.

<sup>42</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 68.5.

<sup>43</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 68.7.

<sup>44</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 69. Oddly, Cyril does not mention the origins of Leontius who was the next abbot and the one that allowed him to enter the monastery.

<sup>45</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 124.

Roman, briefly became the superior.<sup>46</sup> Melitas, who was from Beirut, was Sabas' successor as abbot of the Great Laura until 537 after his death. Gelasius, one of the Isaurian brothers just mentioned, then became abbot until 546. Following the struggle with the "Origenists" who briefly took control of the Great Laura, Conon, a native of Lycia, became abbot in 548.<sup>47</sup>

The nature of Palestinian monasticism also would make regionally based monasteries difficult to maintain. Even if it was the case that Armenian monks came to the Great Laura because of the existing Armenian population, Sabas would not have accepted every monk due to the nature of the laura itself. Only mature, both in age and spiritual development, monks were given cells and allowed to remain. The novice monks would be instead sent to various coenobia for years of training before being allowed to return. A monk's place of origin mattered much less than their spiritual development and place within the monastic community.

It seems then that while it is possible that our sources feature monks from Cappadocia, Armenia, and Cilicia more frequently due to these being the homes of central monastic figures, there does not appear to be enough information to fully support this approach. Instead, it is better to focus on the wide distribution of home provinces for the Palestinian monastic population. As was the case near Gaza, the Judean Desert was equally influenced by "outsiders," many from the same regions of the empire, yet scholarship has not emphasized the continued influence of, or dependency on, those regions. Individuals, particularly monks, from throughout the Mediterranean world found their way to Palestine due to its historic place in Christian history.

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<sup>46</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 124.15. Apparently, this was a position Paul did not want, as after six months he fled first to Arabia and then Severianus' monastery at Caparbaricha. See Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 124.15-20.

<sup>47</sup> The nature of the Origenists will be discussed in the theology chapter. Conon was still the abbot of the Great Laura in the late 560s or 570s when Moschos was at the Laura of Pharan. See Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 42.



The foreign nature of monastic leaders does not mean that the regions must remain eternally connected. While the leading monastic figures of both the Judean Desert and Gaza were not native to the province, they were engrained in their local monastic communities. It was to these local figures and spiritual elders that the subsequent generations of Palestinian monks of the sixth century looked to for guidance and as exemplars of holiness.

### **Local Communities & Leaders**

The importance of one's local community and its leaders can be witnessed within Cyril's presented connection between the Judean Desert and the early Egyptian fathers.<sup>48</sup> Cyril presents Euthymios as a great admirer of Arsenius.<sup>49</sup> Whenever Egyptian monks could visit Euthymios he would ask them to pass along tales of Arsenius way of life and Euthymios "committed himself with complete zeal to imitate his virtues."<sup>50</sup> Cyril presents Euthymios' imitation of Arsenius' ascetic virtues as the primary reason he was deemed worthy of receiving "communion with the all-holy Spirit, illumination by the divine light, and the spiritual gift of discernment."<sup>51</sup> For Cyril, it was then through Euthymios that the wisdom of the Egyptian fathers was passed along in the

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<sup>48</sup> Jan-Eric Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), 31-32.

<sup>49</sup> Arsenius was a contemporary of Euthymios. He was born in Rome in the mid-fourth century and became a tutor for the future emperors Arcadius and Honorius. He secretly fled Constantinople and went to Alexandria around 394 and by 400 and had made it to Scetis and became a disciple of John the Dwarf. He fled Scetis following its second destruction in 434 and went to Troe near Memphis where he died around 449. See Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* Rev. ed. Cistercian Studies Series; No. 59 (London: Mowbray, 1981), 9.

<sup>50</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymios*, 34.15-20. καὶ αὐτὸς ἀκούων πᾶσαν σπουδὴν ἐποιεῖτο τούτου μιμεῖσθαι τὰς ἀρετὰς.

<sup>51</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymios*, 34.25-35. ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν πάσῃ σπουδῇ τὴν ἐκείνου ἐμμήσατο πολιτείαν, καὶ τῶν ἐκείνῳ προσόντων χαρισμάτων ἡξιώθη ἐν ἀπολαύσει γενέσθαι τῆς τε τοῦ παναγίου πνεύματος μετουσίας καὶ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ φωτὸς ἐλλάμψεως καὶ τοῦ διορατικοῦ χαρίσματος.

Judean Desert. This can be witnessed in an anecdote Cyril provided about his policy of not allowing physically young monks to enter the laura. When an adolescent monk would come to the Great Laura, Sabas would send them to the Coenobium of Theodosios.<sup>52</sup> When sending the young monks along, Sabas was said to have explained to them “child, it is unsuitable, rather harmful, for a laura such as this to contain any adolescents. This was ordained by the ancient fathers of Scetis and transmitted to me by our great father Euthymios.”<sup>53</sup> Within Cyril’s narrative of the Judean Desert, the Egyptian fathers remained a foundational source of monastic wisdom. However, this wisdom was interpreted and passed along through Euthymios. It had become a part of the local monastic tradition. To this end, while the legacy and guidance of the early Egyptian fathers remained an engrained element of Palestinian monasticism, it was not a living entity, nor should it be taken as an expression of Palestinian monasticism remaining under the visage of Egypt. Instead, by the sixth century it had become an element of the monastic past, interpreted and passed along within a Palestinian framework

This can be seen in the *Correspondence* as well. Any reader of the letters of Barsanuphius and John can easily witness the emphasized importance placed upon the Egyptian fathers of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (AP). Next to biblical verses, sayings from the AP are the second most cited sources by both of the Old Men.<sup>54</sup> In addition, along with psalms it was

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<sup>52</sup> This monastery was founded by Theodosios, who would become archimandrite along with Sabas around 479. It was built up around the cave which Theodosios originally used for his own seclusion. See Yizhar Hirschfeld, “List of the Byzantine Monasteries in the Judean Desert,” In *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land* (1990), 26-28.

<sup>53</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 114.10-15. τέκνον, ἀπρεπές ἐστι, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐπιβλαβές τὸ τὴν τοιαύτην λαύραν ἀγένειον ἔχειν τινά· τοῦτο δὲ καὶ οἱ ἀρχαῖοι τῆς Σκήτεως πατέρες ἐνομοθέτησαν καὶ ἐμοὶ παραδέδωκαν οἱ περὶ τὸν μέγαν πατέρα ἡμῶν Εὐθύμιον.

<sup>54</sup> John Chryssavgis identified at least eighty direct references to the AP. See Chryssavgis, *Barsanuphius and John: Letters Volume I*, 11.

sayings of the desert fathers which John the Prophet suggested reading as part of a monk's nightly routine.<sup>55</sup> It is from these two sources that the Old Men form their core of monastic and spiritual wisdom. However, the *Letters* also stress that fact that the wisdom of the *AP* could not be freely accessed by anyone that chose to read them. Instead, in connection with the necessity of monks to submit themselves to a spiritual elder, as will be detailed in the way to perfection chapter below, monks needed the wisdom of the *AP* to be interpreted and passed through the living elders of their community.

The ancient editor of Barsanuphius and John's letters recognized this in his prologue. While the *Correspondence* was a source of monastic wisdom for those who read them, the context in which they were written must always be remembered. The Old Men had responded in particular ways based on the individual they were writing to, whether to a coenobitic or anchoritic monk, or to a novice or elder.<sup>56</sup> For this reason the editor warns readers that "the same teachings are not appropriate for everyone."<sup>57</sup> Interesting for the present discussion, the editor goes on to say "often they responded according to the weakness of thought of the one asking, deliberately condescending themselves in order that the one asking not fall into despair, as we find in the *Lives of the Old Men*."<sup>58</sup> While wisdom could be gained and it was beneficial to read the *Correspondence* and the *AP*, they were both products of a more intimate environment. These

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<sup>55</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 143.

<sup>56</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, Prologue.

<sup>57</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, Prologue Οὐ γὰρ τὰ αὐτὰ τοῖς πᾶσιν ἀρμόττει διδάγματα.

<sup>58</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, Prologue. Πολλάκις δὲ καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἀσθένειαν τοῦ λογισμοῦ τοῦ ἐρωτῶντος ἀπεκρίναντο, οἰκονομικῶς συγκαταβαίνοντες, ἵνα μὴ εἰς ἀπόγνωσιν καταπέσῃ ὁ ἐρωτήσας, καθὼς καὶ ἐν τοῖς βίοις τῶν γερόντων εὐρίσκομεν.

literary productions were an instructive tool that needed a teacher's guidance. The wisdom of the *AP* needed to be passed through the local monastic networks rather than read on its own.

In practice we can see this occur in several letters between Dorotheos of Gaza and John the Prophet. In previous letters John had advised Dorotheos that if he was asked something or had noticed something to which he could provide an answer, he could speak so long as he did so with humility and was mindful to not take pleasure in the vainglory of speaking.<sup>59</sup> Dorotheos responded asking why John had told him this was the proper way, when “the fathers say to not answer before being asked, for Abba Nisteros was admired for this when he said in the monastery: ‘I and the donkey are one.’”<sup>60</sup> John responded in a similar way as the editor of his own letters, the elders spoke with their recipients in mind. The advice to only speak when spoken to was meant for individuals more spiritually advanced than Dorotheos. Only when Dorotheos was “dead to the world” as Nisteros was, could he say that he was like the donkey.<sup>61</sup> Dorotheos needed John to interpret and advise on the beneficial aspects of the sayings. They could not just be read and taken at face value.

This issue appears in one other letter between Dorotheos and John. Again, Dorotheos cites a saying from Abba Isaiah of Scetis and asked what it meant.<sup>62</sup> John responded that it followed in line with sayings of John the Dwarf and reveals what it meant to be free from all

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<sup>59</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 289-90.

<sup>60</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 291 τῶν Πατέρων λεγόντων πρὸ ἐρωτήσεως μὴ ἀποκρίνεσθαι καὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Νισθερώ διὰ τοῦτο θαυμασθέντος, ὅτι ἐν κοινοβίῳ ὦν εἶπεν ὅτι «Ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ ὄνος ἐν ἑσμεν. Euprepios 7, Poemen 45, Nisteros the Coenobite 2. Poemen cites Prov 18:13 (“He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him”) as the source of this command.

<sup>61</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 291. νεκροῦσαι ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου

<sup>62</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 311.

cares of people.<sup>63</sup> However, John begins his explanation by saying this was meant for someone physically and spiritually advanced. If Dorotheos wished to become a genuine monk he should guard himself from these conversations as they can lead to laziness, boldness, and insubordination.<sup>64</sup>

Dorotheos also read the *Ascetical Works* of Basil of Caesarea (d.379) and sought John's advice on how to fit the work into the advice John had given him. In a previous letter, John had told him that if an individual asked him for an item and Dorotheos knew that he needed it, then it should be given joyfully.<sup>65</sup> However, if Dorotheos found out that the individual did not need the item then he should not give it, but instead simply say that he had been commanded by the abbot to not give anything to those without need. Dorotheos responded, saying that he read in the *Ascetical Works* that the act of giving is always beneficial for the giver more than the receiver.<sup>66</sup> If this was the case, Dorotheos asked, how could he keep the commandment John had given him? John responded to this query in the same manner as before. Basil had addressed this passage to "monks and those who are able to govern themselves with discernment."<sup>67</sup> A monk such as Dorotheos who was still in the coenobium did not have the "command nor authority to

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<sup>63</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 311. AP, John the Dwarf 30, 31.

<sup>64</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 311 γεννῶνται γὰρ ἐξ αὐτῶν καταφρονήσεις, χαυνότης, ἀνυποταξία καὶ ἡ δεινὴ παρησία.

<sup>65</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.317.

<sup>66</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 318. This concept is drawn from Acts 20:35 "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Lockman Foundation, *New American standard Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 1977).

<sup>67</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 318 Τοῦτο τὸ κεφάλαιον τῷ κατὰ μόνας εἴρηται καὶ δυναμένῳ ἑαυτὸν κυβερνῆσαι μετὰ διακρίσεως.

do anything of one's own will," but instead was under the authority of a spiritual father—such as John—to whom they must give complete obedience.<sup>68</sup>

As part of a series of letters concerning the difference between a command and advice given by an elder, a monk asked John the Prophet if written documents—either ecclesiastical canons or sayings of the fathers—should be taken as commands in the same way as the spoken word.<sup>69</sup> In regards to the sayings of the fathers, John responded that if it was given in the form of a statement then the monk should take that as a command. John continued, however, that the monk should also ask an elder about the meaning of the sayings as they are not always able to understand them properly.<sup>70</sup> A monk's local community remained required in order to understand and benefit from the sayings of the fathers.

Without a doubt the wisdom of the early Egyptian fathers held a significant place and their influence can be felt in the works of Barsanuphius, John, and Dorotheos. However, that wisdom was not void of context and could not, nor should it, be interpreted by a monk on their own. The sayings of the desert fathers, just as the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John, were said and written with specific subjects in mind. That fact must always be remembered and required the interpretation and advice of a monk's local elder to understand which tales were beneficial and how they could be understood. Palestinian monasticism was interpreting the *AP* based on their own understanding of asceticism and the monastic life, rather than being an identical continuation of that tradition.

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<sup>68</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 318 καὶ οὐκ ἔχει ἐντολήν, καὶ οὐδὲ ἐξουσίαν μίαν ἔχει ποιῆσαι τὸ ἴδιον θέλημα.

<sup>69</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 370.

<sup>70</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 370. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα κατὰ ἐρώτησιν Πατέρων βεβαίωσον τῷ σὺ λογισμῷ, οὐ πάντως γὰρ ὅτι ὀρθῶς νοεῖς τὴν τῶν ρημάτων δύναμιν.

## A Continuing Monastic Tradition

By the time Moschos wandered throughout the eastern Mediterranean in the late sixth century seeking out holy and ascetic individuals, it was no longer tales of Antony, Arsenius, or the other early Egyptian Desert Fathers that he sought out. While the early fathers were still recognized as ascetic champions, it was not their lives and actions that Moschos sought to capture in his *Meadow*.<sup>71</sup> Instead, he sought out the more recent and living examples of ascetic holiness. Moschos makes this clear from the beginning of the *Meadow*, stating in his prologue that within “you will discover the virtues of holy men who have distinguished themselves *in our own times*.”<sup>72</sup> The *Spiritual Meadow* then is an updated collection of ascetic and monastic wisdom. While not supplanting the greatness of the *AP* and the first generation, it is adding to that knowledge and strives to show the continued attainment of monastic virtue throughout sixth-century Palestine and the rest of the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>73</sup>

Many of the tales of the *Meadow* are anchored in a historical context, which allows us to get a sense of when some of Moschos’ monastic exemplars of ascetic virtue lived.<sup>74</sup> What this reveals is that many of the monks around whom Moschos wrote were of the more recent generation. They were monks of the early and mid-sixth century who had in only recent memory died or in fact were still living.

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<sup>71</sup> See Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 7 for the sole mention of Antony.

<sup>72</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Prologue. Emphasis is my own. The “you” in this passage is Sophronios. Εὐρήσεις γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀρετὰς ἁγίων ἀνδρῶν ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις ἡμῶν διαλαμπάντων.

<sup>73</sup> Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 116.

<sup>74</sup> Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 118.

Patrick, an elder at the monastery of Theodosios known for his humility and obedience, was alive around 552 when Macarios became Patriarch of Jerusalem.<sup>75</sup> Moschos highlights the monk's virtue and confirms the time frame when another monk of the monastery, Julian, ceased to be in communion with Macarios due to his acceptance of Origenist doctrine and sought out the wisdom of Simeon Stylites the Younger on the Wonderful Mountain.<sup>76</sup> Simeon expounds on the holiness and orthodoxy of Patrick by telling Julian to accept his eucharistic prayer during this time of upheaval in the Palestinian church.

Another monk, Elijah the Grazer can also be placed in the mid-sixth century due to his breaking in communion with Macarios. Elijah himself told Moschos that he had retreated to a cell near the Jordan because of Macarios and it was here that he became tempted with "thoughts" by the devil after a female traveler had asked him for water.<sup>77</sup> After starting out after her, Elijah was given a vision of hell and what would await him if he gave into passion. An apparition then caused Elijah's lust to die and he returned to his cell.<sup>78</sup>

In another set of tales, we learn that George served as abbot of the monastery of Theodosios in the late 570s or early 580s, as Tiberius II was emperor when he went on monastic

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<sup>75</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 95-96. Patrick was said to have given up his position as abbot at the monastery of Abazan and came to the coenobium of Theodosios due to his humility and desire for obedience. Macarius was named patriarch in 552 but then removed by Justinian due to his 'Origenist' leanings. He was then reinstated as patriarch after condemning Origenism in 564 and remained as patriarch until his death in 575.

<sup>76</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, 96.

<sup>77</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 19. Καὶ μετὰ τὸ ἀπελθεῖν αὐτὴν, ἤρξατο ὁ διάβολος πολεμεῖν με εἰς αὐτὴν, καὶ ἐμβάλλειν λογισμούς.

<sup>78</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 19. Καὶ ἐλθὼν ὁ φανεῖς μοι ἱεροπρεπής, ἀνέστησέν με, καὶ τὸν πόλεμον ἔπαυσεν, καὶ γὰρ ἀνεχώρησα εἰς τὴν κέλλην μου, εὐχαριστῶν τῷ Θεῷ.



business to Constantinople.<sup>79</sup> This George was granted a vision revealing the location of the body of Peter the Grazer when he began to build the Church of Saint Kerykos at Phasaelis.<sup>80</sup> From this information we also learn that Abba Sisinius—an anchorite living near the village of Bethabara close to the Jordan—died around this time as well. Moschos praised the elder for his choice to abandon his bishopric “for the sake of God” and became a hesychast.<sup>81</sup> Moschos met with a monk named Leontios at the monastery of Theodosios who had previously been one of the monks—along with Cyril of Scythopolis himself—to be transferred to the New Laura after the Origenists were expelled in 553 and was there granted the opportunity to see an angel standing at the altar.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to tales in which dates can be ascertained, a number of individuals can be dated from the fact that Moschos talked with them in person, or at least Moschos was interested in presenting these figures as contemporaries. The uncertainties of some elements of the chronology of Moschos travels means that we can not be more specific than the late sixth century. However, this does allow us to get a better sense of which generation of monks Moschos focused on. Gerontios, who was serving as the abbot of the monastery of Euthymios, told Moschos how he used to be a grazer living beyond the Dead Sea.<sup>83</sup> In the monastery of Theodosios, Moschos met Canon who only took bread and water once a week as well as

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<sup>79</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 93.

<sup>80</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 92. Phasaelis was a city in the Jordan valley, situated to the north of Jericho. Kerykos appears to refer to the child martyr Kyrikos/Cyricus who was said to have been killed along with his mother Julitta in Tarsus during the persecution of Diocletian.

<sup>81</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 93.

<sup>82</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 4.

<sup>83</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 21.

Theodoulos who never slept lying down.<sup>84</sup> At the monastery of Abba Abraham Moschos met with its current abbot, John of Cyzicos.<sup>85</sup> When asked how someone could attain virtues, John replied that you must “hate the opposed vice which is the antithesis of that virtue.”<sup>86</sup> Moschos also met with the abbot of the Cave of Sabas, Eustathios.<sup>87</sup>

At the monastery of Saint Sergios near to Bethlehem Moschos talked with the abbot Eugenios, who—Moschos reported—would later become the Bishop of Hermopolis in Egypt.<sup>88</sup> Eugenios related a tale of a recently deceased monk named Alexander the Cilician. Alexander lived as an anchorite in a cave near the Jordan, however, as he reached old age Eugenios brought him into the monastery. As Alexander approached the end of his life, he became confined to a bed and it was at this point that a demon attempted to torment him. In response Alexander chided the demon on its weakness for waiting until the monk was bedridden and near death to attack after a life of strict asceticism. In this way Alexander held the demon at bay for ten days until he passed in tranquility and peace.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 22, 23.

<sup>85</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 187. Moschos says this monastery was founded by Abraham the Great. It seems to have been on the Mount of Olives. Not much more information is available.

<sup>86</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 187. Ἐὰν θέλει τις ἀρετὴν κτήσασθαι, εἰ μὴ πρῶτον μισήσῃ τὴν ἀντιδιάμετρον αὐτῆς κακίαν

<sup>87</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 186.

<sup>88</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 182. Located in the province of Thebaid in upper Egypt.

<sup>89</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 182. Ταῦτα καθ’ ἐκάστην ἡμέραν μετὰ καὶ ἄλλων πλειόνων λέγων, τῇ δεκάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ μετὰ πάσης ἡσυχίας τῷ Δεσπότη Χριστῷ παρέδωκεν τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ ἐν εἰρήνῃ.

An anchorite known as John the Red appears in several tales of the *Meadow* as both the source and subject of tales.<sup>90</sup> It was reported that the monk lived in a cave on the Socho estate, about twenty miles from Jerusalem.<sup>91</sup> Moschos said to have talked with John in person placing him in the later sixth century. It was from John that Moschos was given the tale of the two brothers who refused to leave each other and helped to build the Monastery of the Byzantines discussed above. Moschos also attributes to him a tale that appears to be an early version of the tale of Mary of Egypt in which a young religious woman (Μονάστριά) leaves Jerusalem for the wilderness and survives for years, subsisting on a miraculously replenishing basket of beans.<sup>92</sup> The woman then reveals her life and God's miracles to an anchorite near the Jordan.

Dionysios, a priest of the Church of Ascalon, related several tales about John the Red to Moschos. Dionysios reported a tale of John in which a lion moved out of his way when walking along a narrow path lined with thorny bushes.<sup>93</sup>

As a final instance, Moschos met with Abba John, a priest at the Monastery of the Eunuchs who supplied him with several tales.<sup>94</sup> From him we can place Calinicos the Great at the Great Laura as well as Abba Sergios living as an anchorite in the Rouba in the mid to late

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<sup>90</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 97, 179, 180, 181. He is the source of the tales in chapters 97 and 179 and the subject in 180 and 181.

<sup>91</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 180.

<sup>92</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 179. Cyril also has a similar tale. See Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 233.5-234.10.

<sup>93</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 181.

<sup>94</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 136, 137, 138. The Monastery of the Eunuchs was originally one of the two monasteries founded around Elias' cell near to Jericho, most likely prior to 474. One of these monasteries was then transferred to a group of eunuchs who came to Jerusalem after their patron Juliana, the granddaughter of the emperor Valentinian III died in 527/28. See Cyril, *Life of Sabas* 171.6-25; Hirschfeld, "List of Byzantine Monasteries," 22-23.

sixth century. John himself said he visited Calinicos when he was young.<sup>95</sup> Sergios and his disciple Sergios the Armenian were previously living somewhere on Sinai and then had come to the *paneremos* of Rouba in the Judean Desert.

For Moschos, ascetic greatness was not limited to the previous generations of Egyptian desert fathers.<sup>96</sup> The past was not the only source of monastic inspiration. Instead, as Moschos strove to reveal through his *Meadow*, monks of his own generation had reached perfection and it was still possible to become citizens of heaven on earth. The *Spiritual Meadow* serves as a testament to the fact that Moschos' contemporaries did not need to look back to the fourth century as their only source of monastic wisdom, but instead could look much closer, both chronologically and geographically. In comparison to our other sources, Moschos' *Spiritual Meadow* does not focus on one specific monastic community. Instead, he was interested in collecting wisdom from the larger monastic and Christian population throughout the eastern Mediterranean with ascetic virtue being what bound the tales geographically disparate tales together. Through his travels and collected tales, however, Moschos does focus on specific regions which reveal centers of ascetic greatness. While Egypt, both upper and lower, retain their importance as sites of monastic and ascetic wisdom it is no longer the only or the most important. Palestine emerges as its own, independent, region which boasted its own exemplars of ascetic perfection and a monastic history of its own.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 137. Calinicos the Great was discussed in the monastic mobility chapter.

<sup>96</sup> For Moschos it was also not limited to the monastery either. One of the more intriguing elements of the *Spiritual Meadow* is Moschos' expansion of ascetic virtues and holiness to all Christians. Monastic, clerical, and lay individuals were all possible exemplars of Christian virtue and hold a spot within the *Meadow*. That said, monks are still the most prominent source of ascetic virtue and are more often than not Moschos' focus. See Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 116-17 for further discussion.

<sup>97</sup> Booth, *Crisis of Empire*, 90.

## Conclusion

Despite the independent origins of monasticism in the regions of Gaza and the Judean Desert, by the sixth century the two had become intertwined. While monasticism in these two regions of Palestine can still be examined individually, they are connected and held together by their common expression of monasticism and asceticism as well as their cosmopolitan nature.

While the early Egyptian fathers—especially the image of them captured in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*—were and remained influential sources of ascetic wisdom in Palestine and Gaza in particular, they were not passed along unfazed. It is not evidence of Palestinian monasticism remaining under the cultural sway of Egypt. Instead, the wisdom and legacy of the Egyptian Desert became absorbed into and a part of Palestinian monasticism. The wisdom of the fathers continued to be passed to novice monks, but through the increasingly independent lens of Palestinian elders. From its origins, monasticism throughout Palestine is presented as being made up of foreigners from throughout the eastern Mediterranean. However, rather than remaining ever under the sway of Egypt, Cappadocia, Armenia, or any of the other regions they instead became incorporated into a monastic system of its own. By the sixth century Palestine had become a region which boasted its own perfected holy men which could serve as examples of how a monk should live their life.

## Chapter 2. The Way to Perfection

Barsanuphius beautifully describes the ascetic process as:

From the beginner's state until perfection, from the commencement of the way until its end, from the stripping of the old self with its desires<sup>1</sup> until putting on the new self, created according to God<sup>2</sup>, from becoming a stranger of the sensory world to becoming a citizen of heaven and an heir of the spiritual world of promises.<sup>3</sup>

It is this process that the chapter will focus on by detailing the core virtues and praxes which Palestinian authors emphasized as required for the idealized monk to adopt along their path towards perfection. Although very few individuals would reach the end goal of perfection—Barsanuphius and John the Prophet repeatedly insisted they were not among the perfect—it remained the ultimate objective in Palestinian monasticism.

Through focusing on this ascetic process, this chapter contends with two historiographic issues. The first is the ongoing tendency to treat the monasteries of the Judean Desert and Gaza as distinct units. The second is the concept that Judean Desert monasticism was not interested in inner personal ascetic development or spiritual formation. Instead, scholars have argued, by the time Cyril was writing in the mid sixth century Judean Desert monasticism was focused on imperial orthodoxy and an organizational hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> The entire point of being a monk in the

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<sup>1</sup> Eph 4:22; Col 3:9.

<sup>2</sup> Eph 4:24; Col 3:10.

<sup>3</sup> Barsanuphius and John, *Correspondence*, in *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*, ed. F. Neyt and P. de Angelis, 5 Vols. Sources chrétiennes 426, 427, 450, 451, 468 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997-2002), L. 49. ἀπὸ ἀρχαρίου καταστάσεως μέχρι τοῦ τελείου, ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τῆς ὁδοῦ μέχρι τοῦ τέλους αὐτῆς, ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐκδύσασθαι τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον σὺν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις αὐτοῦ μέχρι τοῦ ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν νέον, «τὸν κατὰ Θεὸν κτισθέντα», ἀπὸ τοῦ γενέσθαι τῆς γῆς ἀλλότριον τῆς αἰσθητῆς, γενέσθαι δὲ οὐρανοπολίτην καὶ κληρονόμον τῆς νοητῆς γῆς τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν.

<sup>4</sup> John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-631* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 161-62, 182; Daniël Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy: A New Perspective on Cyril of Scythopolis' Monastic Biographies as Historical Sources for Sixth-Century Origenism* (Roma: Centro studi SAnselmo, 2001), 254; David Mezynski, "The Effects of the Origenist Controversy on the Pastoral Theology of Barsanuphius and John," (PhD Diss., Fordham University,

Judean Desert—scholars have suggested—was to live in the Holy Land with a close connection with the patriarch of Jerusalem, the organized Church, and the imperially sanctioned orthodoxy which it promoted. This idea of monasticism stands in contrast to the region of Gaza, which scholars have argued remain focused on an inner spiritual formation which has been connected with Egyptian Monasticism to the point of seeing Gaza as a satellite community as the previous chapter has discussed.

This chapter seeks to complicate this scholarly interpretation. I argue that these interpretations are incorrect over-generalizations and have been the result of focusing too heavily on certain parts of our source base, particularly the second half of Cyril's *Life of Sabas*. By focusing on how these monastic authors expressed and understood asceticism, I argue that we can witness how, in fact, interior spiritual formation remained integral to the monastic communities of the Judean Desert and how their understanding was in line with those of Gaza. It is worth noting that I do not wish to argue that the monasteries of the Judean Desert did not have a connection with the ecclesiastical institution of Jerusalem. The continued appointment of monks as Patriarch of Jerusalem, the appointment of Sabas and Theodosios as archimandrites due to popular monastic outcry, and the financial support given to the monasteries clearly show

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2012), 34 “Instead of seeking to develop theological reflection or knowledge, Cyril of Scythopolis seems more concerned with dogmatic purity,” 43, 56, 210, 218-220, “We might characterize this difference as mediator versus shepherd. In the former model, Sabas, who seemingly did not encourage the monks of his community to develop their interior spiritual lives, acted as an intercessor between God and his foundations. In the latter model, Barsanuphius and John, who did encourage ascetic struggle, brought their disciples to God in the company of the saints.”; Jan-Eric Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), 111, “In Cyril’s hagiography the foundation of truth rests with the institutionalized Church, while the role of his holy men seems to be merely that of confirming the doctrines established by the incumbents of ecclesiastical offices. Cyril’s concern appears to be that of revealing his holy men merely as protectors and defenders of institutionalized stability and order. True faith is less a result of ascetic charisma and monastic discipleship than a sign of the necessity of obedience to the ecclesiastical hierarchy.”

this to be the case.<sup>5</sup> Instead, my interest is in revealing that such a connection did not preclude Judean Desert monasticism from also focusing on the ascetic development of the individual as was the case in Gaza.

## Cutting of the Will

### *Humility and Obedience*

When asked how a novice monk should behave, Barsanuphius responded:

He should be living in great humility, not taking himself into account in anything, nor saying ‘what is this or that?’ But he should be living in great obedience and submission, neither making himself equal with anyone, nor saying ‘so-and-so is honored, why am I not honored? So-and so is calmed concerning everything, why am I not calmed? When he is despised in everything, he is not aroused to anger.’<sup>6</sup>

This emphasis on the need for humility and obedience was stressed not only by the Old Men of Gaza, but throughout the monastic literature of Palestine. These two virtues are identified as the core of the ascetic life and, as the quote suggests, the ones which monks must first obtain. For, it was only through obedience and humility that the higher virtues could possibly be attained.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 9. Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 92. Ἐν ταπεινώσει διάγειν πολλῇ, μὴ ψηφίζοντα ἑαυτὸν ἐν τινὶ πράγματι, μὴ λέγοντα· Τί ἐστὶ τοῦτο; ἢ Διὰ τί τοῦτο; Ἄλλ’ ἐν ὑπακοῇ καὶ ὑποταγῇ πολλῇ οὐκ ἰσάζων ἑαυτὸν τινὶ οὐ λέγων· Τιμᾶται ὁ δεῖνα, διὰ τί οὐ τιμῶμαι; Ἀναπαύεται κατὰ πάντα, διὰ τί καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἀναπαύομαι; Καταφρονούμενος εἰς πάντα οὐκ ἀγανακτεῖ, ταῦτα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ ἀρχαρίου, θέλοντος μετὰ ἀληθείας σωθῆναι. Elsewhere Barsanuphius defines perfect humility as the ability to “To bear insults and reproaches as much as our teacher Jesus endured” See Barsanuphius, *Correspondence* L. 150 Τὸ βαστάζει ὕβρεις καὶ ὀνειδισμοὺς καὶ ὅσα ἔπαθεν ὁ διδάσκαλος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς. Barsanuphius based this on Mt 11.29 “learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls.”

<sup>7</sup> Mezynski, “Effects of Origenist Controversy,” 96; Perrone, “The Necessity of Advice: Spiritual Direction as a School of Christianity in the Correspondence of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza,” in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity* eds. Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, (Boston: Brill, 2004), 137-138; William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 195-196, 199-200, 237-238; Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1993), 116-120; Aryeh Kofsky, “Renunciation of the Will in the Monastic School of Gaza,” *Liber Annuus* 56 (2006): 321-346.



Dorotheos of Gaza confirms and expounds on the importance of humility in particular as the cornerstone of the ascetic life. Dorotheos anonymously quotes one of the desert fathers, saying “before everything else we need humility.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, Dorotheos placed humility at the core of not only the ascetic life, but the Christian life as a whole, placing it above self-control, almsgiving, fear of God, and even faith.<sup>9</sup> Dorotheos details two kinds of humility. In the first, a monk must consider everyone else to be wiser and held in higher esteem than themselves.<sup>10</sup> In the second, one must attribute all virtuous actions to God.<sup>11</sup>

The virtues of humility and obedience remain a foundational element in Cyril’s description of his monastic fathers as well. On entering the coenobium of Theoctistus, Sabas made “humility and obedience the root and foundation of his way of life.”<sup>12</sup> Prior to coming to Palestine, Euthymios is described as building up “true humility.”<sup>13</sup> In his deathbed speech, he stated that “for each virtue is strengthened through love and humility.”<sup>14</sup> Euthymios also praised obedience, as the reward for that virtue was “...great, since God desires obedience over sacrifice,

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<sup>8</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Letters*, In *Dorothee de Gaza: Œuvres spirituelles*, edited and translated by Lucien Regnault and J. de Préville, *Sources Chrétiennes* 92 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1963), *Discourses* 2.1-2. Πρὸ παντὸς χρήζομεν τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης,

<sup>9</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.19-20.

<sup>10</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.33.1-4. Dorotheos quotes one of the anonymous sayings of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* here. For this kind of humility, one must put themselves below everyone. Barsanuphius confirms this type of humility as well. See Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 278.

<sup>11</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.33.4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas*, in *Kyrrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 92-92.5 τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην καὶ τὴν ὑπακοὴν ρίζαν καὶ θεμέλιον τῆς ἑαυτοῦ πολιτείας.

<sup>13</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas*, in *Kyrrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 13.5 τὴν ἀληθινὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην.

<sup>14</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 58.08. πᾶσα γὰρ ἀρετὴ δι’ ἀγάπης καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνης βεβαιοῦται.

but disobedience causes death.”<sup>15</sup> John the Hesychast paid total obedience to the steward under whose guidance Sabas placed him and served with all humility when first being accepted into the Great Laura.<sup>16</sup>

According to Dorotheos, humility held such a foundational place in the ascetic life because without it, no other virtues could set the monk right.<sup>17</sup> Humility was the one virtue that could protect the soul from “each passion and from every temptation.”<sup>18</sup> The devil, as the adversary of the Christian, continually attempted to place obstacles along the proper path and it was only the lowliness of humility that could overcome these challenges.<sup>19</sup> This was in line with Barsanuphius’ understanding of the importance of humility, as it was this virtue which:

makes a person the dwelling place of God. And from this dwelling place the evil demons are banished as well as their ruler the devil, along with their dishonorable passions. Then that person is found to be a temple of God, sanctified, illuminated, cleansed, blessed by grace, filled with every fragrance and goodness and exultation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 29.22-25 ὁ μὲν τῆς εὐπειθείας μισθὸς μέγας, ἐπεὶ περ θέλει ὁ θεὸς ὑπακοὴν ὑπὲρ θυσίαν· ἡ δὲ παρακοὴ θάνατον κατεργάζεται.

<sup>16</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas*, in *Kyriillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 205.16.

<sup>17</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.26.23 οὔτε ἄλλη μία τῶν ἀρετῶν δύναται κατορθωθῆναι χωρὶς τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης.

<sup>18</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.30.2-4. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ παντὸς πάθους, ἀπὸ παντὸς πειρασμοῦ σκεπάζει ἡ ταπείνωσις τὴν ψυχὴν. Humility was understood as the opposite of pride, thus Abba John of Cyzicos in one of Moschos tales suggested that monks must hate pride in order to attain humility. See John Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, In *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Graeca, Vol. 87:3, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1865), Ch. 187.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the place of the devil and demons in late antique monasticism see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 232-36, 327-30; Richard Valantasis, *The Making of the Self: Ancient and Modern Asceticism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008) 150-62; John Chrysostom, *John Climacus : From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 173-82.

<sup>20</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 119. καὶ ἡ ταπείνωσις ποιεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἶναι κατοικητήριον Θεοῦ. Καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς κατοικίσεως ταύτης ἐξορίζονται οἱ πονηροὶ δαίμονες καὶ ὁ τούτων ἀρχηγὸς διάβολος,

In practical terms, this meant that if something negative happened to a humble monk, they would not succumb to anger, and blame others for their misfortune. Instead, they accuse themselves as being worthy of such punishments.<sup>21</sup> In one of his tales, Moschos echoes this sentiment through an elder at The Cells who lists the cures for the soul as: piety, righteousness, humility, and obedience.<sup>22</sup>

In Dorotheos' conception of ascetic development, humility was the gateway to and motivation for higher virtues.<sup>23</sup> For instance, it was because of humility that monks should seek to pray unceasingly. The humble monk knew that nothing good happens in the soul without the help of God. So, they continually prayed that God may act mercifully toward them. It is never a monk's own abilities that they do what is right, but instead it was always through God.<sup>24</sup> The more a monk recognized and acknowledged this, the more humble they would become and the more help God provided them, which advanced their spiritual progress.<sup>25</sup>

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σὺν τοῖς ἀτίμοις αὐτῶν πάθεισι. Καὶ εὐρίσκεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος ναὸς Θεοῦ ἡγιασένος, πεφωτισμένος, κεκαθαρισμένος, κεχαριτωμένος, πεπληρωμένος πάσης εὐωδίας καὶ ἀγαθωσύνης καὶ ἀγαλλιάσεως,

<sup>21</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.30.

<sup>22</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 144. Συναγάγωμεν τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς θεραπεύματα, τοῦτ' ἔστιν εὐσέβειαν, δικαιοσύνην, ταπεινοφροσύνην, ὑποταγήν,

<sup>23</sup> It was also for the sake of humility that monks should engage in physical labor. This will be discussed below.

<sup>24</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.38,

<sup>25</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.38,

## The Need to Cut the Will

Obtaining humility and obedience was achieved through the destruction of personal will.<sup>26</sup> The letters of Barsanuphius and John label this process as cutting one's own will (*κόψαι τὸ ἴδιον θέλημα*). Barsanuphius detailed what this term meant, "henceforth cut off all of your selfish desires and your righteousness, your disdain and indifference and instead attain humility, obedience, and submission. Consider yourself as nothing in all things and you will be saved."<sup>27</sup>

While the phrase "cutting one's own will" does not appear in the literature of the Judean Desert, the concept itself is present. Cyril's Euthymios states, "those who renounce this life must not have their own will but first attain humility and obedience."<sup>28</sup> Taking this concept further, Cyril urged the necessity for the removal of self-will by relating the punishments monks received for maintaining their self-reliance in the face of commands given to them by their abbas.<sup>29</sup>

Cyril himself received such a punishment when he first came to the Judean Desert. John the Hesychast urged him to enter the Coenobium of Euthymios rather than a *laura* due to his youth and inexperience with the monastic life. Cyril ignored this command and instead entered the *Laura* of Calamon near the Jordan. This decision, according to Cyril, led him to become seriously ill for six months.<sup>30</sup> He remained in this reduced state until John appeared to him in a

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<sup>26</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 462; Kofsky, "Renunciation of the Will," 321-346; Perrone, "The Necessity of Advice," 137.

<sup>27</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.379. Λοιπὸν ἀπὸ τῆς ἄρτι κόψον ὅλα τὰ θελήματά σου καὶ τὰ δικαιώματά σου, τὴν καταφρόνησίν τε καὶ ἀμέλειαν. Καὶ ἀντ' αὐτῶν κράτει ταπείνωσιν, ὑπακοήν, ὑποταγήν. Ἔχε δὲ σεαυτὸν ἐξουδενωμένον ἐν πᾶσι, καὶ σῶζῃ. John states that cutting the will is part of the process of cutting the root of the passions, see Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 462.

<sup>28</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 17.13-15 δεῖ τοὺς ἀποτασσομένους τῷ βίῳ μὴ ἔχειν ἴδιον θέλημα, ἀλλ' ἐν πρώτῃ τάξει κρατεῖν τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην καὶ τὴν ὑπακοήν.

<sup>29</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 267.

<sup>30</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 216.20-217.10.

dream and informed him that he had been sufficiently punished for disobeying his command.<sup>31</sup> Cyril was then healed as soon as he awoke and immediately left the laura for the coenobium as originally commanded.

Euthymios used a similar punishment on a monk that refused to take on the job of the muleteer. The monk, Auxentius, having refused the job after being asked by the steward was then brought before Euthymios who urged him to accept. Auxentius continued to refuse based on his ignorance of the local area and languages along with a fear of the temptations that the position held. Euthymios continued to urge him, suggesting that they would pray for him and that God will not punish him for his obedience. After Auxentius persisted in his refusal Euthymios became angered (ἐμβριμησάμενος) and as a “reward for his disobedience” Auxentius was immediately stricken with demonic trembling (τρόμωι δαιμονικῶι).<sup>32</sup> Eventually Euthymios healed the disobedient monk who immediately begged forgiveness and accepted the position.

Sabas as well used this type of miraculous punishment on the self-willed (αὐθάδεια) monk James.<sup>33</sup> James attempted to build a new laura while Sabas was wandering the utter-desert. After returning and learning of this, Sabas admonished him on the grounds that he was still under the sway of pleasure and vainglory and not yet suited to undertake the formation of others.<sup>34</sup> When James refused to accept this and seek forgiveness Sabas opted for punishment. He stated:

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<sup>31</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 217.3-5.

<sup>32</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 29.10-15. ὁ τῆς παρακοῆς μισθός.

<sup>33</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 129.4.

<sup>34</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 129.20-25.

My child, I am counseling you as I consider advantageous for you. But since you persist in disobedience, you will learn through experience that Scripture says truly ‘Every evil person awakens rebellion and so the Lord sends an unmerciful messenger to him.’<sup>35</sup>

James was then seized with shivering and a fever and remained sick for seven months until he recognized the penalty for “self-will and rebellion” (αὐθαδείας καὶ ἀντιλογίας) and sought forgiveness at which point Sabas cured him.<sup>36</sup>

While Cyril does not use the phrase “cutting one’s own will” (κόψαι τὸ ἴδιον θέλημα) as Barsanuphius, John, and Dorotheos did, the sentiment is certainly present. Monks must abandon their “self-will” (αὐθάδεια) in favor of complete obedience to one’s spiritual master. Obstinate refusal to follow these commands deemed beneficial could be met with severe punishment until a monk learned this core lesson of the monastic life.

### **The Need of a Spiritual Director**

The process of subduing one’s own will could only be attained through a discipleship with a spiritual director.<sup>37</sup> It was to them and one’s abbot that a monk must give their obedience and through whom all decisions must pass.<sup>38</sup> Barsanuphius said “become obedient and you will

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<sup>35</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 129.25-130. Pr 17:11. ἐγὼ μὲν, τέκνον, ὅπερ νομίζω συμφέρειν σοι, συμβουλεύω· ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐπιμένεις τῇ ἀπειθείᾳ, ἤδη διὰ πείρας μαθήσῃ ὅτι ἀληθῶς ἡ γραφή λέγει· ἀντιλογίας ἐγείρει πᾶς κακός, ὁ δὲ κύριος ἄγγελον ἀνελεήμονα ἐπιτέμπει αὐτῷ.

<sup>36</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 130.09.

<sup>37</sup> Mezynski, “Effects of Origenist Controversy,” 66; Jeremy Driscoll, *Steps to Spiritual Perfection: Studies on Spiritual Progress in Evagrius Ponticus* (Mahwah, NJ.: Newman Press, 2005), 27-29; Perrone, “The Necessity of Advice,” 144. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 26-87.

<sup>38</sup> Barsanuphius cites Proverbs 31 :4, “Do all things with counsel, as divine evidence for the need of a spiritual teacher.” LXX Proverbs 31:4. *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

come to humility, and all passions will be burned away from you.”<sup>39</sup> It is for this reason that a personal connection between master and disciple remained a necessity of the monastic life in both the Judean Desert and Gaza.

Perfect obedience meant utterly trusting in and adhering to the commands of one’s spiritual elder. In several instances, this meant monks must put themselves in what appeared to be harm’s way. During a trip to visit Cyriacus when he was staying at Sousakim, Cyril mentioned coming across a lion. Cyril was terrified but John, one of Cyriacus’ disciples, urged him to remain calm and when the lion saw that they were going to visit the elder it let them pass.<sup>40</sup> The lion had befriended the holy man and his disciple trusted in Cyriacus ability to keep the lion tamed.

Dorotheos recalled a similar incident when he was at Seridos’ monastery. The disciple of a great old monk living near Ascalon came to Tawatha on business.<sup>41</sup> His abba had commanded him to return to his own cell by vespers, however, a heavy storm had started by the time he planned to leave and the monks encouraged him to wait it out. The disciple refused this out of his desire to follow the commands of his spiritual father and his trust in his ability to keep him safe. The disciple then went out into the storm and without hesitance swam across a flooding river and continued to his cell.

Complete obedience also meant not assuming what one’s director meant but instead only following the commands that had actually been given. Moschos relates a tale about a disciple

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<sup>39</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 239 Καὶ γενοῦ εὐπειθής, καὶ ἔρχῃ εἰς ταπείνωσιν, καὶ καίεται ἀπὸ σοῦ ὅλα τὰ πάθη.

<sup>40</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 232-232.9. Cyril tells a similar tale about two of John the Hesychast’s disciples. See Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 215.10-25.

<sup>41</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 1.22.

named John whose elder asked him to complete a task and gave him some bread for the journey.<sup>42</sup> When John returned the elder noticed he had not eaten the bread and asked why. John replied that the elder had not told him that he was allowed to eat the bread, so he had abstained. Moschos connected this utter obedience to John being granted by God the ability to heal after his master had died.

The letters of Barsanuphius and John stress the need for this same level of complete obedience to one's spiritual director. A monk asked John if, when sent on an errand for the monastery, it would be alright to accept an invitation to eat with others if one's abbot had not given a blessing to do so. John responded that yes it would be alright as long as the situation was not harmful to the soul. However, the monk would need to announce this to his abbot immediately on his return and seek forgiveness for his sin.<sup>43</sup> John further explained his reasoning for this stance in another letter to the same monk. Even if an action appeared to be good if undertaken without a blessing from an elder then it could still be harmful.<sup>44</sup>

A monk's reliance on the guidance of one's spiritual director can be witnessed when it came for a monk to transition from the coenobitic to the anchoritic life. For a monk to assume that they knew the proper time to transition to a cell and a life of stillness was for them to give in to arrogance and pride.<sup>45</sup> A spiritual elder was needed to recognize that a monk had advanced

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<sup>42</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 56.

<sup>43</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 355.

<sup>44</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 356.

<sup>45</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 239, 535. Mezynski, "Effects of Origenist Controversy," 71.



and gained virtue while still remaining obedient and humble. Otherwise, even though it was something good, the monk could become “an enemy of God.”<sup>46</sup>

When Sabas desired to transition from the coenobium to the cell, he approached Longinus, his abbot, for permission who subsequently asked Euthymios if this should be allowed.<sup>47</sup> It was Sabas who gifted John the Hesychast his first solitary cell and gave him permission to live in stillness.<sup>48</sup> In turn, after entering the monastery of Euthymios in 544 Cyril would remain in contact with John the Hesychast—whose cell was at the Great Laura— and continue to put his whole state before him.<sup>49</sup> In addition, it was on John’s command that Cyril transitioned to the New Laura in 556, marking his transition out of the coenobium.<sup>50</sup> Similarly in Gaza, John of Beersheba sought Barsanuphius’ final consent to make the transition to a full life of a hesychast.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to direct guidance, disciples could also rely on their directors to share the burden of their sins. When responding to a monk named Andrew, Barsanuphius stated that he would bear half of his burden.<sup>52</sup> When Andrew responded to the Old Man, concerned that his remark meant that he would not be given full forgiveness, Barsanuphius further explained his meaning. The Old Man described the relationship as an equal partnership, each taking on an

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<sup>46</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 535. πολέμιος τῷ Θεῷ.

<sup>47</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 93.20.

<sup>48</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 206.15-20

<sup>49</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 217.11-14.

<sup>50</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 217.23.

<sup>51</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 36. This will be discussed in more depth in the *hesychia* section below.

<sup>52</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 72.

equal share of Andrew's sins.<sup>53</sup> Barsanuphius refused to take on a greater portion, so as to not attempt to appear stronger and give in to pride. Nor could he take on the full burden as that would only be possible for the perfect, which he denied having achieved.<sup>54</sup>

Cyril mentioned that when Abba Eustathasius, who served as Superior of the Monastery of the Cave, was attacked by a demon of blasphemy he sought out John the Hesychast to lay his worries before him and asked for his prayers.<sup>55</sup> Cyril related that John prayed over Eustathius, saying that the temptation of blasphemy would never appear to him again at which point the temptation immediately vanished and had never returned.<sup>56</sup>

Spiritual elders also served as a source of relief by the simple act of listening to their disciples' concerns. The burden of troublesome thoughts were lessened through the act of divulging them to their abbas.<sup>57</sup> The promise of beneficial advice and a soothing of their concerns is presented as having an instantaneous effect on the monks. Cyril's discipleship with John the Hesychast continues to serve as an excellent example. Cyril visited John's cell when he was bothered by a satanic thought. After revealing it to John and receiving his blessing Cyril felt "immediate relief."<sup>58</sup> In his discourse *On Renunciation* Dorotheos recalled his time as a disciple of the Old Men of Gaza and how he used to write to them when he had troubling thoughts. On one occasion he wrote to John and before he had even finished his letter Dorotheos gained a

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<sup>53</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.73.

<sup>54</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 73.

<sup>55</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 218.10-20

<sup>56</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 218.10-20.

<sup>57</sup> Valantasis, *The Making of the Self*, 177-78; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofksy, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 145-156.

<sup>58</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 218. αὐτίκα ἀνέσεως ἔτυχον

sense of “alleviation and aid” from his anxiety.<sup>59</sup> Another monk wrote to John and gave a similar sentiment. He stated that when he revealed his burdened thoughts to an elder who prayed for him and gave him advice his soul was immediately relieved.<sup>60</sup> The process of becoming a monk and advancing towards becoming a citizen of heaven was one which required complete submission to one’s spiritual director.

Throughout the literature we can witness the need for the destruction of one’s personal will in order to gain the virtues of humility and obedience. This was deemed as the core of the ascetic life in both the Judean Desert and Gaza. By personally adopting these traits and submitting themselves to spiritual directors, Palestinian monks hoped to progress towards the higher virtues and perfection.<sup>61</sup>

### **The Daily Regimen: Prayer, Manual Labor, and Eating Habits**

Even with the supervision and guidance of a spiritual director or abbot, the process of controlling the passions and the attainment of the virtues which we have been discussing was a monumental task. The body itself rebelled against a monk’s attempt at becoming citizen of heaven.<sup>62</sup> To assist monks along this path, Palestinian authors in both the Judean Desert and Gaza stressed the need for external praxes made up of specific guidelines for prayer, manual labor, and eating habits. It was through these daily practices that the mind could remain focused on God and the body controlled.

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<sup>59</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 1.25. καὶ πρὶν πληρώσω, γράφων ἡσθάνομην κουφισμοῦ καὶ ὠφελείας. Τοσαύτη ἦν ἡ ἀμεριμνία καὶ ἡ ἀνάπαισις.

<sup>60</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 374.

<sup>61</sup> Perrone, “The Necessity of Advice,” 137.

<sup>62</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 245, 246.

## *Prayer*

When Euthymios entered a cell at the Laura of Pharan, Cyril says that he freed himself from earthly cares through prayers and fasting which allowed him to focus solely on how to please God.<sup>63</sup> This understanding of prayer is present in both regions of Palestine. Barsanuphius defines perfect prayer as “speaking with God without distraction by bringing together all of one’s thoughts with the senses.”<sup>64</sup> It was through prayer that a monk could hold their intellect present before God.<sup>65</sup> When describing the purpose of prayer, the author of Chariton’s *vita* emphasized its ability to root out evil thoughts from the mind.<sup>66</sup> Prayer is likened to an axe which would cut out the unclean thoughts so that they could not grow roots in the monk. For Dorotheos, prayer was also the most powerful tool to attain his second type of humility and protect against pride.<sup>67</sup> The humble monk recognized that nothing good happens without God. Therefore, monks should continually pray that God will continue to act mercifully towards them and thanking God for that which has already occurred.<sup>68</sup> By praying, the monk humbled himself by recognizing his own weaknesses and inability.

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<sup>63</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 14.15.

<sup>64</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.150. Προσευχὴ δὲ τελεία, ἐστὶ τὸ λαλῆσαι τῷ Θεῷ ἀρεμβάστως, ἐν τῷ συνάγειν ὅλους τοὺς λογισμοὺς μετὰ τῶν αἰσθητηρίων.

<sup>65</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 150. Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 350-54; Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, “Demons and Prayers: Spiritual Exercises in the Monastic Community of Gaza in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 57, 2 (2003).

<sup>66</sup> Chariton, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Mentioned above, in Dorotheos’ second type of humility one must attribute all virtuous actions to God. Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.33.4-5.

<sup>68</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.38

In order to make proper use of prayer, a strict regimen was required. Chariton legislated that his disciples must pray seven times per day and for six hours every night.<sup>69</sup> John the Prophet advised the same amount of time regarding nightly prayers and further detailed the process. Monks should pray for two hours beginning with the setting of the sun, they should then sleep for six hours, and then rise again and pray for the final four hours of the night.<sup>70</sup> In regards to the act of prayer itself, while standing for prayer, John urged monks to ask God to “rescue and set free yourself from your old self” or to say “Our Father in the heavens.”<sup>71</sup> These prayers should be said audibly in order to insure the monks maintain their concentration on God. The ability to pray internally was deemed as too advanced, something that only experienced monks were able to properly perform.

While prayer was required throughout the day, it was not understood as periods of continual confession. A monk asked Barsanuphius if it was necessary to continually confess their sins to God. Barsanuphius told him no, that while it is true that humankind was in all things sinful it was not required to continually admit it and in fact that tendency originated from a demon urging despondency.<sup>72</sup> Instead, a monk should pray for forgiveness for their nightly sins in the morning and their daily sins each evening. The Old Man then adds the proper prayer for these occasions, “Master, forgive me of everything through your holy name and heal my soul, for

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<sup>69</sup> Chariton, 16.19-21.

<sup>70</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 146.

<sup>71</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.143. λυτρωθῆναι καὶ ἐλευθερωθῆναι ἐκ τοῦ παλαιοῦ ἀνθρώπου

<sup>72</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 442.

I sinned before you.”<sup>73</sup> The rest of a monk’s prayer time was meant to be used to maintain their conversation with God.

If persistent in their prayer regimen, a monk might advance enough to reach the ultimate goal; the ability to pray unceasingly. Barsanuphius presents this ability to continually pray during waking hours, derived from 1 Thessalonians 5:17, as a goal monks should strive for.<sup>74</sup> When perfected, monks could pray continually in their hearts without speaking by properly directing their intellect without distraction towards godly fear and illumination in God.<sup>75</sup> Once mastered, Cyril presented unceasing prayer as a weapon that could be wielded against demonic presences. It was through holy hymns and ceaseless prayer that Euthymios and Theoctistus sanctified the cave that would become their first monastery, making it a Church of God.<sup>76</sup> In the same manner, Sabas tamed the demons that resided on the hill of Castellium through his ceaseless prayers and divine praises, allowing him to establish a monastery at the location.<sup>77</sup>

### *Manual labor*

Intimately connected with the act of prayer was manual labor.<sup>78</sup> According to John the Prophet, while sitting down to do their weaving, a monk should recite verses or say Psalms. At the end of each of these the monk should repeat the prayer “God, have mercy on me, the

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<sup>73</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 442. Δέσποτα, πάντα συγχώρησόν μοι διὰ τὸ ὄνομά σου τὸ ἅγιον καὶ ἴασαι τὴν ψυχὴν μου, ὅτι ἥμαρτόν σοι.

<sup>74</sup> Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 392-95; Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 100-113; Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 70-73.

<sup>75</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.150, 431.

<sup>76</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 15.20.

<sup>77</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 110.5

<sup>78</sup> Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 175-76.

wretched one” while still seated.<sup>79</sup> After completing three rows of weaving, the monk should then stand up, offer a genuflection, and then repeat the same prayer. During the night John suggested a similar routine. A monk should recite twelve Psalms or read several pages of the *Lives of the Fathers* and then return to their handiwork.<sup>80</sup> Along with prayer, manual labor consistently appears in the literature as a required activity that monks should engage in.

In Palestinian literature the emphasis was largely on the production of handiworks; forms of labor which could be done by oneself in a cell. This emphasis on handiworks can be connected to the importance placed on *hesychia*, as will be discussed below. Basket plaiting in particular was a popularly produced item.<sup>81</sup> Within the *Meadow* Moschos presents monks engaging in manual labor to create various other products. Rope making was another commonly produced item.<sup>82</sup> Both of these products could be produced using cheap and easily accessible materials such as reeds or palm leaves.<sup>83</sup> However, they were not the only products that monks made. Abba Issac the Theban spent his time making mosquito nets.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps more interestingly, Abba Paul the Greek occupied his hands by making flasks (φλασκια).<sup>85</sup>

The making of these items provided tasks for ascetics to occupy their time with, in order to keep their hands busy. Basket plaiting and mosquito nets both kept monk’s hands busy

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<sup>79</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 143 Ὁ Θεός, ἐλέησόν με, τὸν ταλαίπωρον.

<sup>80</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 143.

<sup>81</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 94.5-10; Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 104.

<sup>82</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, 160. Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 104.

<sup>83</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 104.

<sup>84</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, 161.

<sup>85</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, 163.

through repetitive motions while allowing for prayer or reciting psalms.<sup>86</sup> These tasks were encouraged to prevent monks from becoming idle and allowing their thoughts to stray.

Barsanuphius mentioned this throughout his letters, seeing manual labor as a way to keep monks from having too much leisure time which could allow improper thoughts to approach.<sup>87</sup> The Old Man went so far as to ask one monk who had sent a series of letters about Origenism if he was too idle.<sup>88</sup> This explanation appears in the literature of the Judean Desert as well. Chariton required his disciples to keep their hands busy with handiworks throughout the day except when in prayer or reading scripture.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, when Sabas first transitioned to a life of *hesychia* in a cell outside of the Monastery of Theoctistus, Cyril states that he spent his week weaving baskets out of palm fronds which he would bring with him when he returned to the monastery on weekends in order drop them off and resupply for the coming week.<sup>90</sup>

There are references to more physically intense forms of labor as well. The purpose of these were to strain the physical body for the sake of the spiritual. Dorotheos taught that physical labor helped to lead a monk to humility. Physical labor humbled the body and “when the body is humbled the soul will be humbled with it.”<sup>91</sup> In this way labor became a recognized quality of monks to be praised and emulated, especially for Moschos within the *Meadow*. Abba Strategios, the abbot of the monastery of Theodosios, was praised for excelling above all others of his

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<sup>86</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, 160. Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 105.

<sup>87</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 193.

<sup>88</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 604. This will be discussed in chapter four below.

<sup>89</sup> Chariton, 16.23-26.

<sup>90</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 94.5-10; Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 18

<sup>91</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 2.39.20. Ὁ κόπος οὖν ταπεινοῖ τὸ σῶμα· τοῦ δὲ σώματος ταπεινουμένου, συνταπεινοῦται αὐτῷ καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ



generation for three virtues: fasting, vigils, and hard labor.<sup>92</sup> Moschos also tells of two brothers who were once monks and had promised never to leave each other. However, one brother gave into the vices of the world and would not return to the monastic life. The other brother, retaining his ascetic lifestyle but not willing to abandon his brother, remained by his side.<sup>93</sup> Eventually both were hired to build the Monastery of the Byzantines.<sup>94</sup> The brother who maintained his ascetic practices was able to express this continued lifestyle not only by performing the physical labor required of him, but also by fasting and keeping silent while doing so.<sup>95</sup> The brother's ability to continue to fast and keep silent, habits that he had maintained prior to becoming a laborer, were all the greater because he continued them with the added strain of physical exertion. It was for this reason that his fellow workers recognized his asceticism.<sup>96</sup>

While manual labor was important for the monk, it could also serve as a distraction from the attainment of virtues.<sup>97</sup> Abba Athanasios, speaking to Moschos, remarked that during the previous generation it was important to avoid distractions. Yet now cooking pots and handiworks ruled the activities of the current monastic generation.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps even more direct, an elder at

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<sup>92</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, 103. τὸ νηστευεῖν πολλά, τὸ ἀγρυπνεῖν πολλά, τὸ ἐργάσασθαι πολλά.

<sup>93</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 97.

<sup>94</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 97.

<sup>95</sup> Fasting and silence were both emphasized aspects of the monastic life for Moschos. See Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 9, 10, 13, 17 22, 23, 24, 37, 41, 42, 51, 56, 59, 67, 73, 84, 86, 100, 103, 105, 171, 184, 193.

<sup>96</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 97.

<sup>97</sup> David Brakke, "Making Public the Monastic Life: Reading the Self in Evagrius Ponticus' Talking Back," in *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, eds. David Brakke, Michael L Satlow, Steven Weitzman (Indiana University Press, 2005), 227.

<sup>98</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, 130.

Scetis said that he saw the devil one night offering gardening tools to the fellow brethren.<sup>99</sup> Asking him what he was doing, the devil responded that he was attempting to distract the monks with physical labor so they would spend less time glorifying God.<sup>100</sup> When labor shifted from a spiritual tool meant to control the body into a focus of one's life then it could become a harmful activity. These elements of ascetic praxis were designed and legislated in order to control the body and avoid idleness. Focusing too heavily on labor or diet could be just as harmful as ignoring them.

### *Eating Habits & Fasting*

Along with labor, fasting and a controlled diet were the other ways for monks to assert control over the physical body. As continually seems to be the case, Barsanuphius very directly revealed the purpose of a controlled diet and fasting for the ascetic. Fasting was the process of disciplining the body in order to gain control over and weaken it on account of the passions.<sup>101</sup> To achieve this bodily discipline the monastic authors of both the Judean Desert and Gaza urged monks to adopt a moderate or middle way to diet and fasting<sup>102</sup>. Monks should consume a little less food or drink than would satisfy them. Euthymios defined correct abstinence as to take just enough at mealtimes.<sup>103</sup> Chariton confirms this as well, adding that monks should only eat once a

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<sup>99</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, 55.

<sup>100</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, 55.

<sup>101</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 78; Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 60.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity. Twentieth-anniversary edition with a new introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 181-83; Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 176-77.

<sup>103</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 18.5. Patrich, *Sabas*, 270.

day towards the evening.<sup>104</sup> This routine helped to prevent monks from getting too full and not rising for their nightly vigils. John the Prophet described this stance on abstinence as the way of the fathers and warned individuals to not be so strict as to “be oppressed by one’s discipline.”<sup>105</sup>

The moderate approach to fasting can be witnessed if a monk’s body was already weakened due to an illness. A monk wrote to Barsanuphius concerned because he was eating more than one should due to an illness. The Old Man responded that he did not think a monk would be condemned for giving a weakened body whatever it needed, as long as it actually needed.<sup>106</sup> Illness could be understood as an “invocation of God” and God did not demand more of anyone than they can do, therefore rules related to a monk’s eating habits could be altered to suit bodily needs as long they continue to give thanks to God.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, a monk named Andrew was concerned that his illness was preventing him from fasting, so he wrote to Barsanuphius asking what he should do. The Old Man urged Andrew to not worry for “God does not demand asceticism from those who are suffering from an illness in the body, but from those who are capable and healthy in the body. Showing a little consideration to your body is not a sin. For God does not demand this from you, for he knows the weakness he sent you.”<sup>108</sup> Illness in

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<sup>104</sup> Chariton, 16.

<sup>105</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L 155, 212. τὸ μήτε σπαταλᾶν μήτε βαρηθῆναι ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ.

<sup>106</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.510.

<sup>107</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 510. ἐπὶ κλησὶς Θεοῦ.

<sup>108</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 77. Παρὰ τῶν οὖν ἀσθενούντων τῷ σώματι οὐκ ἀπαιτεῖ ὁ Θεὸς ἄσκησιν, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τῶν δυναμένων καὶ ὑγιαίνοντων τῷ σώματι. Συγκατάβηθι οὖν τῷ σώματι μικρὸν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἁμαρτία. Οὐ γὰρ ἀπαιτεῖ τοῦτο παρὰ σοῦ ὁ Θεός, οἶδε γὰρ ἦν ἔπεμψέ σοι ἀσθένειαν.

fact could be understood as superior, for it could provide a monk with the opportunity to patiently endure the tribulation.<sup>109</sup>

Gluttony is not defined opposingly as the act of consuming more than one should. Instead a monk is guilty of gluttony when they gain enjoyment from their food. According to John the Prophet “Whenever you perceive your thought delighting in the food and hastening you to take it before anyone else, or delighting in pulling food in front of you, this is gluttony.”<sup>110</sup> Even if a monk ate the proper amount they could still fall into the vice if they did not maintain the proper mindset to ensure they were only consuming food out of necessity.

In terms of diet itself, Hirschfeld’s suggestion that the monks of the Judean Desert subsisted primarily on a diet of bread, vegetables, and dried fruits rings true throughout Palestine.<sup>111</sup> Chariton taught his disciples to eat only bread with salt.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Moschos mentioned an elder living in a cell at the Laura of Abba Peter near the Jordan who only ate bread made of bran.<sup>113</sup> In Gaza, John the Prophet vaguely states that a single bowl of cooked food a day was permissible for a healthy monk practicing abstinence.<sup>114</sup> In another letter, an elderly monk named Euthymios could not eat bread, so he asked Barsanuphius about his diet. The Old

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<sup>109</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 78.

<sup>110</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 163. “Όταν βλέπης τὸν λογισμόν ἡδυνόμενον ἐν πράγματι καὶ διώκοντά σε σχεδὸν τοῦ προλαβεῖν πάντας ἢ τὸ ἐλκύσαι εἰς τὸ ἔμπροσθέν σου τὸ πρᾶγμα, τοῦτο γαστριμαργία ἐστί.

<sup>111</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 82-91; Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 128-29.

<sup>112</sup> Chariton, 16.

<sup>113</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 17.

<sup>114</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.159.

Man suggested that he should take four vegetables a week, boil them, and drink the juice.<sup>115</sup>

Cyril relates a tale about John the Hesychast that he spent years subsisting on broth which he would mix with ashes from the censer.<sup>116</sup> Cyril suggested a more limited diet to go along with the anchoritic life. Cyriacus mastered the ‘life of anchorites’ by only taking bread and water every other day and abstaining completely from oil and wine.<sup>117</sup>

Cyril and Moschos do reveal some more severe ascetic tendencies in the form of fasting and the allowance of wine.<sup>118</sup> Cyriacus reported to Cyril that Euthymios was never caught eating except on Saturday and Sunday.<sup>119</sup> Cyril repeats this feat of fasting all week in Sabas’ life when he first transitioned to a solitary life.<sup>120</sup> Sabas’ ability to fast is extended ever further during his Lenten wanderings.<sup>121</sup> Cyril reported that Sabas was able to survive his forty day wanderings by subsisting only on communion on Saturdays and Sundays.<sup>122</sup> Moschos related that an elder named Conon at the monastery of Theodosios only ate bread and water once a week.<sup>123</sup> While Abba Theodosios fasted for two days at a time.<sup>124</sup> Abba Auxanon at the Laura of Pharan would

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<sup>115</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 63.

<sup>116</sup> Cyril, *Life of Hesychast*, 215.20-216.

<sup>117</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 225.5.

<sup>118</sup> It is unclear if this division was because of the regions or due to variances in the genres of the literature.

<sup>119</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 34.

<sup>120</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 94.5.

<sup>121</sup> These will be discussed in the monastic mobility chapter below.

<sup>122</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 109.

<sup>123</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 22.

<sup>124</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 67.

only eat a twenty-*lepta* loaf of bread over a four day period.<sup>125</sup> A point of division between the literature of Gaza and the Judean Desert was on the allowance of wine. Both Old Men of Gaza state in several letters that a monk, even when living in solitude, did not need to abstain from wine completely. Instead, as with food, they should only drink a little—one cup—each day.<sup>126</sup> By contrast, all three of the Judean sources explicitly mention monks only drinking water as a mark of their asceticism. Chariton taught his monks to only drink water.<sup>127</sup> Moschos reported that an elder living in a cell at the Laura of Abba Peter near the Jordan never drank wine.<sup>128</sup>

The initial steps of creating a new self was to gain a mastery over, and in part destroy, the old self. Monks must gain control over the passions, rather than giving into pride, lust, and gluttony they must instead obtain humility and obedience. To achieve this, Palestinian authors emphasized the importance of a daily schedule of prayer, controlled diet, and manual labor which would weaken the body and maintain the mind's focus on God. It was in this manner of personal asceticism that each novitiate could progress their spiritual mastery.

### *Hesychia*

If a monk was able to fully adopt the virtues of humility and obedience through submission to a spiritual elder along with a proper ascetic regimen of fasting, prayer, and manual labor then they might be allowed to adopt the advanced virtue of *hesychia*.<sup>129</sup> The author of

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<sup>125</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 42.

<sup>126</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.159, 225 John acknowledged that if a monk was regularly ill, they were allowed two cups of wine a day.

<sup>127</sup> Chariton, 16.

<sup>128</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 17.

<sup>129</sup> For discussions of *hesychia* see Kallistos Ware, "Silence in Prayer: the Meaning of Hesychia" in *One yet two: monastic tradition east and west: Orthodox-Cistercian symposium, Oxford Univ, 1973*, ed. M Basil Pennington (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1976); John Chryssavgis, "Solitude, Silence, and

Chariton's vita described *hesychia* as the mother of all virtues.<sup>130</sup> and identified Chariton's adherence to it as the reason he was able to reach the pinnacle of spiritual mastery.<sup>131</sup>

Throughout Palestine, the adoption of *hesychia* remained on this pedestal of ascetic development, through which perfection could be reached. For the monastic authors and their audience *hesychia* meant a further withdrawal from the world and another step into the spiritual realm as a citizen of heaven. As an ascetic virtue *hesychia* is a fluid concept, simultaneously holding multiple meanings. With that in mind, I prefer to translate it either as solitude or stillness, which emphasizes the external and spiritual dimensions of the concept respectively which made up the life of the hesychast as a whole.

*Hesychia* could not be adopted by every monk that had entered the coenobium. It was a gift only granted to individuals that had truly attained humility and obedience and proven to their spiritual elders and abbots that they had sufficiently progressed in the creation of their new selves. Sabas is said to have required that a solitary monk must “possess discernment and zealous, a combatant, sober, self-controlled, respectable, a teacher not needing teaching, sufficiently able to curb all the members of his body and a steadfast watch on his mind.”<sup>132</sup> It was only after these milestones were met that a monk was allowed to transition to a cell. In

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Stillness: Light from the Palestinian Desert,” in *The Philokalia: A Classic text of Orthodox Spirituality*, eds. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (Oxford University Press, 2012); Valantasis, *The Making of the Self*, 141, 153; Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 228-29.

<sup>130</sup> Chariton, 24.

<sup>131</sup> Chariton, 24.

<sup>132</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 113.10-14. αὐτοῦ πάντοτε λέγοντος ὅτι δεῖ εἶναι τὸν κελλιώτην μοναχὸν διακριτικὸν καὶ σπουδαῖον, ἀγωνιστήν, νηφάλιον, σώφρονα, κόσμιον, διδακτικὸν οὐ διδασκαλίας χρίζοντα, ἱκανὸν ὄντα τὰ τε μέλη πάντα τοῦ σώματος χαλιναγωγῆσαι καὶ τὸν νοῦν τηρεῖν ἀσφαλῶς.

spiritual terms, Barsanuphius stated that prior to entering stillness monks must “hasten to purify our hearts of the passions of the old self.”<sup>133</sup> It was only after this that stillness could be entered.

While it was the job of the elders to determine if monks were ready to adopt such a life, it was only through God that the true, spiritual, benefits of *hesychia* could be attained. According to Barsanuphius, only at the proper time could the spiritual gift that was *hesychia* be granted.<sup>134</sup> The process of removing one’s own will and attaining humility, obedience, and the other virtues just described by Sabas was the process by which a monk removed from themselves “those things which are hated by the Son of God” which will allow God to make “a home in you and teach you what stillness is and illuminating your heart with ineffable joy.”<sup>135</sup>

### **Elements of *hesychia***

After attaining the requisite virtues and granted the right to enter stillness by both their spiritual elder and God, a monk's routine should consist of both a physical and spiritual element, as reflected in the word *hesychia* itself.

#### *External: Solitude*

Externally *hesychia* meant the practice of secluding oneself in a monastic cell and limiting contact with others to a minimum. Within Palestine this meant living in a cell on the outskirts of a coenobium, a cave in the desert, or transitioning to a *laura*. This transition was

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<sup>133</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 71 Σπουδάσωμεν οὖν καθαρίσαι τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν ἀπὸ τῶν παθῶν τοῦ παλαιοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὃν μισεῖ ὁ Θεός.

<sup>134</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 208.

<sup>135</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 208 καὶ μόνην παρὰ σοὶ ποιήσει καὶ διδάσκει σε τί ἐστὶν ἡσυχία καὶ φωτίζει σου τὴν καρδίαν ἐν χαρᾷ ἀνεκκλήτῳ.



meant to be something slowly adopted. When writing to John of Beersheba, Barsanuphius encouraged him to slowly limit communal meals for eating by himself was in his best interest.<sup>136</sup>

While Chariton is said to have vaguely urged his monks to stay in their cells as much as possible in order to adhere to *hesychia*, the other authors provide a more specific routine.<sup>137</sup> In both Gaza and the Judean Desert, a monk first entering solitude was urged to remain in their cells for five days a week and then come together on Saturday and Sunday for Church service and the Eucharist.<sup>138</sup> Upon entering the life of the hesychast, Barsanuphius advised John of Beersheba to be silent for five days each week and then talk with others for the other two as needed.<sup>139</sup> While still living in the coenobium he founded with Theoctistus, Euthymios maintained this practice, not seeing anyone until Saturday each week because of his practice of *hesychia*.<sup>140</sup> When Sabas transitioned to a cell from the Coenobium of Theoctistus he also followed this practice of five days of solitude. He would leave the coenobium on Sunday evening, bringing with him enough palm leaves to last him the week out of which he made baskets.<sup>141</sup> When first living in stillness, John the Hesychast also kept himself secluded for five days and used the weekend for attending Church.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 32.

<sup>137</sup> Chariton, 17.8-10.

<sup>138</sup> In regard to partaking of communion, as long as the hesychast was still leaving his cell then he should continue to join the others. See Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 32. This was the core lifestyle of the Palestinian laura.

<sup>139</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 50 Barsanuphius gives this same advice to a monk-priest who sought to live in silence. See Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 211.

<sup>140</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 19.19. ἕως τοῦ σαββάτου οὐ συντυγχάνει τινί· ἡσυχάζει γάρ.

<sup>141</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 94.5.

<sup>142</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 206.20-25.

After living in stillness for an extended period of time—Cyril generally stuck to about five years in his narratives—some monks took the practice of solitude further, fully cutting themselves off from everyone and permanently remaining in their cells. Barsanuphius and John the Prophet maintained this practice, both never leaving their cells and refusing to see or talk with anyone except their designated disciple, who read and wrote all of their correspondences with the larger monastic and Christian community. Within the Judean Desert, John the Hesychast maintained this same practice. John “lived in stillness in his cell for four years (498/9-502/3) neither going to church nor meeting with anyone except the one that served him.”<sup>143</sup> He then transitioned to a cell in Rouba, coinciding with Sabas’ exile from his laura, where he spent six years in solitude, “withdrawing himself from all human intercourse.”<sup>144</sup> Finally, after Sabas returned from his exile and building the New Laura, John the Hesychast returned to a cell in the Great Laura where he remained for forty-seven years. During this last period, Cyril describes him as living in solitude and not leaving his cell, however, he did seem to begin to meet with individuals that sought him out.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 208.25-209. καὶ ἀπὸ τότε ἡσύχαζεν εἰς τὸ κελλίον αὐτοῦ μήτε εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν προερχόμενος μήτε τινὶ τὸ σύνολον συντυγχάνων παρεκτὸς τοῦ διακονοῦντος αὐτῷ.

<sup>144</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 209.10. πάσης ἀνθρωπίνης συναναστροφῆς ἀφιστῶν ἑαυτόν.

<sup>145</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 225.09. Cyril mentions that John was despondent over not leaving his cell to be present for Sabas’ death. See Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 214.5-10. In addition to Cyri’s multiple personal meetings with John and the tale of Eustathius mentioned above, Cyril mentions John exorcising a child by anointing him with oil. See Cyril, *Life of John Hesychast*, 218.5. It seems that John would physically see people, as he opened his door for his disciple Theodore. See Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 219.5-10.

Even for monks who lived a life of complete enclosure, the practice of *hesychia* never meant complete separation from their monastic community.<sup>146</sup> A monk's solitude required the support of other monks in order to maintain such a life. The semi-anchoritic form of monasticism that prospered in Palestine served to support this understanding of asceticism via the combined monasteries such as those of Gerasimus and Seridos or the lauras of Chariton or Sabas.<sup>147</sup>

Coenobitic monks and those seeking *hesychia* maintained an interdependent relationship. The labor and continued interaction with the lay world that coenobitic monks practiced provided the funding and support that monks living in stillness required.<sup>148</sup> In return, hesychasts provided spiritual guidance and support as directors and through prayer.<sup>149</sup> Barsanuphius recognized and encouraged this relationship. In a letter to John of Beersheba he suggested that coenobitic monks should recognize the crucial nature of their labors and use that knowledge to drive away excuses and to always carry out their jobs to the best of their ability.<sup>150</sup> The life of stillness and the spiritual wisdom which it could provide could only be attained and maintained within a monastic system that supported it. The spiritually elite hesychasts required a coenobitic base.

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<sup>146</sup> Leah Di Segni, "Monastery City and Village in Byzantine Gaza," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 55 (2005): 49; Mezynski, "Effects of Origenist Controversy," 68; Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 139-66.

<sup>147</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 264, 356. Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 12-13.

<sup>148</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 213-4.

<sup>149</sup> Barsanuphius described hesychasts as providing "rest and protection." See Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 6

<sup>150</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 6.

### *Spiritual: Stillness*

As with all elements of asceticism, the physical act of secluding oneself was undertaken not for the sake of the physical itself, but for the spiritual benefits. When sitting in their cell, a monk must remain ever mindful of their actions and thoughts. In particular, a monk must have a clear understanding of why they were sitting in their cell and what they sought to achieve through this practice.<sup>151</sup> It was in this way that a monk could avoid falling into the temptation of pride.<sup>152</sup> Barsanuphius stated that a hesychast should sit “in humility, fear of God, and unfeigned love toward all” while in their cell.<sup>153</sup>

According to Barsanuphius, it was only through such an act of perfect stillness that a monk would come to “know Christ and be amazed by his gift.”<sup>154</sup> Cyril similarly described Sabas’ practice of *hesychia* as consisting of him “Speaking with God and cleansing his mind’s eye so as with ‘unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory’.”<sup>155</sup> Cyril maintains this practice in his description of John the Hesychast, who is described as “desiring to speak with God in stillness and cleansing his mind’s eye with long philosophy so as with ‘unveiled faces

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<sup>151</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 211.

<sup>152</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 211.

<sup>153</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 32 κατὰ ταπείνωσιν καὶ φόβον Θεοῦ καὶ ἀγάπην πρὸς πάντας ἀνυποκρίτως.

<sup>154</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 22 τότε γνώσῃ αὐτὸν καὶ θαυμάσεις τὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ δωρεάν. Prior to this point, Barsanuphius described monks as being among the people and thus could not understand.

<sup>155</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 99.5. 2 Co 3:18. ὁμιλῶν τῷ θεῷ καὶ τὸ τῆς διανοίας ὀπτικὸν ἐκκαθαίρων πρὸς τὸ ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου.

contemplate the Lord's glory'.”<sup>156</sup> The life of stillness was the final preparation a monk needed to shed themselves of all earthly cares and make themselves ready and worthy to receive God.<sup>157</sup>

The attainment and practice of *hesychia* is identified as the pinnacle of ascetic mastery in both the Judean Desert and Gaza. It marked the personal spiritual progress of the individual monk and their place among the spiritual elite of the monastic communities of Palestine.

### **Sabas as Perfect Ascetic**

It has been argued that Sabas was not interested in personal ascetic development. John Binns labels him the “builder” in contrast to Euthymios the “ascetic.”<sup>158</sup> Generally, these scholars have suggested that under Sabas—and through the writings of Cyril—monasticism in the Judean Desert became increasingly focused on organizational hierarchy and imperial orthodoxy rather than spiritual development of the inner self. When examining the life of Sabas by itself this interpretation does make some sense. Within the narrative of his life, after Sabas founded the Great Laura, Cyril spends only a small percent of his *vita* on Sabas’ personal ascetic regimen, instead preferring to focus on his efforts to colonize the desert.<sup>159</sup> Rather than interpret this as Sabas disinterested in personal ascetic development, however, it should instead be seen as Sabas already reaching perfection prior to founding his first laura. Cyril transitions away from

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<sup>156</sup> Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, 209.10-15. Ο ὁμιλεῖν τῷ θεῷ ἐπιποθεῖν ἐν ἡσυχίαι καὶ τὸ τῆς διανοίας ὀπτικὸν τῇ μακρᾷ φιλοσοφίαι ἐκκαθᾶραι πρὸς τὸ ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου.

<sup>157</sup> Barsanuphius encouraged John of Beersheba to not care about anything after becoming a hesychast. See Barsan L. 36.

<sup>158</sup> Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, 162, 182. Rubenson, “The Egyptian Relations of Early Palestinian Monasticism,” in *The Christian heritage in the Holy Land*, eds. Anthony O’Mahony, Göran Gunner, and Kevork Hintlian (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995): 44-45; Mezynski, “Effects of Origenist Controversy,” 43, 218-220.

<sup>159</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 90.08-10.

Sabas' personal asceticism not because he is not interested in it, but because he had already said enough.

Prior to Sabas founding the Great Laura in 483 at the age of forty-five, Cyril focused on Sabas' asceticism. From his youth at the monastery of Flavianae near his home town of Mutalasca, Sabas is presented as devoting himself to self-control, physical labor, and surpassed his fellow monks in "humility, obedience, and labors for the sake of piety."<sup>160</sup> After coming to the Palestine and entering the Coenobium of Theoctistus, Sabas made "humility and obedience the root and foundation of his life."<sup>161</sup> After ten years in the coenobium and again surpassing all other monks in fasting, vigils, humility, and obedience Sabas then transitioned to a life of stillness, at the age of thirty, in a cell on the outskirts of the monastery.<sup>162</sup> After five years in this cell, Sabas transitioned to a full anchoritic life in the desert of Coutila following the death of Euthymios in 473. It was here that Sabas "devoted himself to solitude, fasts, and ceaseless prayer, making his mind a spotless mirror of God."<sup>163</sup> In 478, in his fortieth year of life, Sabas then transitioned to a cave near Siloam where he spent five years alone before founding the Great Laura at the same spot. For the first forty-five years of his life Cyril focused almost exclusively on Sabas' personal spiritual development.

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<sup>160</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 89.5-89.14 ὑπερηκόντισεν ἅπαντας τῇ τε ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ ὑπακοῇ καὶ τοῖς ὑπὲρ εὐσεβείας πόνοις.

<sup>161</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 92-92.5 τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην καὶ τὴν ὑπακοὴν ρίζαν καὶ θεμέλιον τῆς ἑαυτοῦ πολιτείας.

<sup>162</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 93.20-94.

<sup>163</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 95.15-17.

Cyril's description of Sabas' decision to establish the laura indicated Sabas' ascension to the status of perfection. Cyril described the process as a transition from the life of a combatant to one of husbandry. Sabas was convinced by the word of God to:

not fruitlessly engage with enemies inferior to him, but to transfer his spiritual powers from warlike abilities to cultivating those who had grown rank with evil thoughts for the benefit of the many, in the words of the prophets, 'beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.' So, he began to receive all who came to him.<sup>164</sup>

It was not from a lack of interest either on the part of Sabas or Cyril, but instead a spiritual and narrative decision. Having described the process by which Sabas reached the pinnacle of ascetic discipline over the body and attaining the required virtues, Cyril and Sabas shifted their focus to passing along this knowledge and training to others. It was not that personal ascetic development was no longer important or that Sabas did not care about it, but instead he was focused on helping as many others as possible achieve and maintain a monastic existence.

Cyril maintains the analogy of combat and husbandry when a monk named James attempted to build a laura when Sabas was away. When he learned of this, Sabas admonished James for lacking the experience and power to govern other monks. How could he possibly turn to agriculture while he was still in the grips of war?<sup>165</sup> Through Sabas, Cyril makes it even clearer. How could James who had not yet overcome the passions undertake the formation of others when he was still under the sway of pleasure and vainglory.<sup>166</sup> In contrast to James, Sabas

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<sup>164</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 99.10-18. προτραπείς ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου μὴ τοῖς ἡττημένοις ἐχθροῖς μάτην προσασχο- λεῖσθαι, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τῆς πολεμικῆς ἕξως μετασκευάσαι τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεις ἐπὶ τὸ γεωργεῖν τοὺς ὕλομανοῦντας τοῖς τῆς κακίας λογισμοῖς ἐπ' ὠφελείαι τῶν πολλῶν, ἐν τῷ λέγειν τὸν προφήτην· συγκόψατε τὰς μαχαίρας ὑμῶν εἰς ἄροτρα καὶ τὰς ζιβύνας εἰς δρέπανα. καὶ ἤρξατο πάντας δέχεσθαι τοὺς ἐρχομένους πρὸς αὐτόν.

<sup>165</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 129.21-22.

<sup>166</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 129.23-24.

had overcome the passions and transformed his inner self to a state of perfection. This was achieved not through his adherence to imperial orthodoxy, but through his personal ascetic regimen of humility, obedience, and fasting.

While no longer the narrative focus, Cyril does continue to indicate that Sabas continued to maintain an ascetic existence. As will be detailed in the monastic mobility chapter below, Sabas continued to practice a period of exile through a yearly wandering during Lent which served as a method of practicing *hesychia* and *xenetia*. Cyril also mentioned Sabas enjoying a period of solitude after returning from the construction of the New Laura.<sup>167</sup>

Sabas' increased interaction with the world and Cyril's focus upon it was not a shift in focus for monasticism in the Judean Desert, but recognition that Sabas had entered a state of perfection in which he could do so without harming his soul. Sabas' ability to loosen his rules on food serves as an analogy for this. While Sabas had achieved the ability to practice long fasts during his Lenten wanderings, he was also able while entertaining others or at a festal meal to "take beyond satiety."<sup>168</sup> He had reached a level of spiritual and bodily control that he could loosen and refasten his rule without losing his ascetic way of life. In one of his tales, Moschos presents this ability as something of the greater fathers, only safely done by those that had learned true control of the body.<sup>169</sup> Cyril's focus on Sabas' building efforts and further interaction with ecclesiastical and imperial authorities should not be read as Judean monasticism shifting away from inner ascetic development. Instead it should be understood as Sabas personally reaching ascetic perfection, which allowed him—and Cyril's narrative—to interact

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<sup>167</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 126.10.

<sup>168</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 165.10. ὑπὲρ κόρον λαμβάνων.

<sup>169</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 162.



with the world now that he was a citizen of heaven and no longer tempted by the physical passions.

### Conclusion

In a unique example of monks traveling between the monasteries of the Judean Desert and Gaza, Moschos tells of a robber who came to Abba Zosimos the Cilician at the Laura of Firminos and begged to become a monk.<sup>170</sup> Zosimos admitted him, however, a few days later the elder told the novice that he must go to the community of Abba Dorotheos near Gaza and Maiouma because Zosimos feared that the governor would arrest him for his former crimes. After nine years the novice monk returned to Zosimos and said that despite the fact that he had “fasted inasmuch as was in my ability, practiced abstinence, lived in obedience and then in full stillness, and in fear of God” he still daily saw the phantom of a child he killed and had decided that he must turn himself in.<sup>171</sup>

Despite the former crimes of this individual, through this tale Moschos expressed the ascetic ideals that this chapter has focused on, the path towards perfection. Even though Zosimos was in a laura in the Judean Desert and the monastery of Dorotheos in Gaza, the tale presents the ascetic ideal as the same. Through Zosimos, Moschos does not mention the need for the new monk to adhere to a specific doctrine or ecclesiastical authority. It was only the process of creating the new self that the Judean author emphasized. We can and should speak of the monastic communities of Palestine as a whole. The personally driven and interiorly focused notion of monasticism and asceticism which categorized the early monastic movements

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<sup>170</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 166.

<sup>171</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch.166 καὶ ὡς ἐπὶ μοι ἐνήστευσα, καὶ ἐγκρατευσάμην, καὶ μετὰ πάσης ἡσυχίας καὶ φόβου Θεοῦ ἔζησα ἐν ὑποταγῇ, καὶ ἐπίσταμαι,

remained ingrained in the communities of both Gaza and the Judean Desert throughout the sixth century.

### Chapter 3. Forms of Authority

As the previous chapter has shown, Judean Desert monasticism remained focused on inner ascetic spirituality as was the case around Gaza. If the same emphasis on humility and stillness was present throughout Palestinian literature, the question must then be asked, why has scholarship persisted in suggesting otherwise? This chapter provides one answer to this question by examining the forms of authority wielded by the key monastic figures of both the Judean Desert and Gaza. In particular, the distinction between administrative and spiritual authority is of interest, exemplified in the monastic setting by the *hegoumenos* (ἡγούμενος) (abbot) and spiritual directors.<sup>1</sup> This chapter argues that the variations in the expected duties of these positions have caused the qualities emphasized in their literary constructions to differ, which in turn has impacted how scholars have viewed monasticism in the Judean Desert and Gaza on the whole. It is important to note that this chapter is not attempting to argue that abbots did not have spiritual authority or even a lesser authority than the spiritual directors and holy men in their monasteries. Instead, the emphasis is on the freedom from much of the administrative worries that spiritual directors enjoyed and how this has shaped perceptions of the monastic figures.

Prior to delving into the variances between these positions and who held them, it is important to delineate what these terms meant in Palestinian monastic literature. The *hegoumenos* (ἡγούμενος), the abbot, was the highest-ranking position in a monastery.<sup>2</sup> It was an appointed—generally by the previous abbot or consensus by the monks of the monastery—

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<sup>1</sup> See the Way to Perfection chapter above for the importance of spiritual direction in Palestinian monasticism.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism. A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 170.

position and one granted for life.<sup>3</sup> The abbot was considered the successor to the founder of their monastery and as such was granted complete authority.<sup>4</sup> Abbots were responsible for the maintenance and care of their monastery and its monks. As such, they were responsible for the admission of new monks to their monastery as well as dictating the set of ascetic practices their monks were to follow.<sup>5</sup> Abbots also decided on and organized the building of additional churches, cells, reservoirs, storerooms, or guesthouses as required and ensured their monastery's storehouse had sufficient supplies to feed its population.<sup>6</sup> The abbots of Palestine were assisted by a senior monk who was granted the position of the deputy (δευτεράριος) in the coenobium or the steward (οικονόμος) in the laura.<sup>7</sup>

Spiritual directors, generally just called abbas in the texts, were spiritually advanced monks who served as mentors or ascetics guides within their monastic communities.<sup>8</sup> This was

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<sup>3</sup> Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), 73.

<sup>4</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 72.

<sup>5</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 73; Patrich, *Sabas*, 169; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas*, in *Kyrrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 91.5-91.10; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of John the Hesychast*, in *Kyrrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 205.5-10; Barsanuphius and John, *Correspondence*, in *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*, ed. F. Neyt and P. de Angelis, 5 Vols. *Sources chrétiennes* 426, 427, 450, 451, 468 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997-2002), L. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 73.

<sup>7</sup> Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 73; Patrich, *Sabas*, 174-179.

<sup>8</sup> John Chryssavgis, *John Climacus : From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 143-144; John Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert: the spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers: with a translation of Abba Zosimas' Reflections* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2003), 63-68; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity. Twentieth-anniversary edition with a new introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 227-228; William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 229-232.

not an officially granted position, but instead one of recognition, acknowledging the wisdom and authority of the individual monk. Spiritual directors took on their own disciples, using their spiritual mastery and discernment to guide them along the path to perfection. They also held a place of honor within the monastic communities and were approached by other monks and lay people seeking advice and, at times, miracles.

### **Spiritual Versus Administrative Authority**

For our present concerns, the most significant comparisons are those made between the Judean Desert figures of Sabas and Euthymios and the Old Men of Gaza Barsanuphius and John. The two Judean Desert figures founded their own monasteries and remained as abbots for the remainder of their lives, serving as both the administrative and spiritual authorities of their communities.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, neither Barsanuphius or John founded the monastery at Tawatha nor did they serve as abbot at any point. The letters are clear that John joined the community significantly after its establishment. In regard to Barsanuphius the letters are largely silent prior to his establishment as a spiritual director at Tawatha. However, a brief reference seems to suggest that Seridos had established the monastery on his own and Barsanuphius later joined the community. In Letter 17, between Barsanuphius and John of Beersheba, the Great Old Man states “for how many have desired us as elders and rushed to acquire us, and God did not grant us to them. Yet while he [Seridos] sat still God sent us to him, and made him our true child.”<sup>10</sup> Francois Neyt argued based on this passage that Barsanuphius was not responsible for the

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<sup>9</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 169.

<sup>10</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 17. Πόσοι γὰρ ἤθελον ἡμᾶς τοὺς γέροντας καὶ ἔτρεχον, καὶ οὐκ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς; Καὶ καθημένου αὐτοῦ ἔπεμψεν ἡμᾶς πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ Θεός, καὶ τέκνον γνήσιον ἡμῶν αὐτὸν ἐποίησε.

founding of the monastery at Tawatha and there seems to be little reason to doubt this assertion.<sup>11</sup> None of the additional letters give any sort of indication that Barsanuphius was involved in the establishment of the monastery and, as will be shown below, he is presented as respecting and enforcing the authority and position of Seridos as the abbot. The Old Men of Gaza's authority emanated from their status as perfected holy men and while there were instances in which they advised Seridos on some administrative issues, they were never fully responsible for the welfare of the monastery in the same fashion as Seridos or Sabas. This is a significant contributing reason for the distinction in portrayals. In light of this, I will suggest that a more adapt comparison between Gaza and the Judean Desert would be between the Old Men of Gaza and John the Hesychast and Cyriacus, both of whom wielded spiritual authority in their respective monasteries but not administrative ones.<sup>12</sup>

### **Sabas and Euthymios**

Euthymios and Sabas were responsible for founding their own monasteries and permanently maintaining the position of *hegoumenos* over them. In this role, they did not only serve as spiritual directors, guiding their monks through the ascetic process, but also maintained administrative duties ensuring that they had “within the monastery the required necessities, in order that none of those who desired to withdraw from the outside turmoil would be compelled

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<sup>11</sup> Neyt, *Correspondence*, vol. 1 tome 1, 37; Neyt “A Form of Charismatic Authority,” *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974): 64. Hevelone-Harper was unsure on this reading, see Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 34. Even if Barsanuphius was involved in the founding of the monastery, he certainly never held the position of abbot, as will be discussed below.

<sup>12</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 169.

on account of these needs to go out into the world.”<sup>13</sup> Cyril chose to focus on and praise both of these aspects in his lives.

From the outset Euthymios maintained responsibility for the physical needs of his monastery and its monks. After establishing his *laura* it was Euthymios that asked Peter Aspébetus, bishop of the Saracens, to build his first disciples their cells and decorate their church.<sup>14</sup> After the death of Theoctistus, Euthymios seems to have maintained some authority over his first monastic foundation as well.<sup>15</sup> Originally Euthymios asked Patriarch Anastasius to care for the monastery after Theoctistus had died, however, the patriarch said that since Euthymios had helped to found and make holy the site, he should look after it.<sup>16</sup> Euthymios consented and he alone appointed a monk named Maris as *hegoumenos*. When Maris died two years later it was again Euthymios who appointed Longinus as the next abbot. While Euthymios did not hold the title of *hegoumenos* of the monastery of Theoctistus, as Sabas would over his other monasteries as we shall see below, he did seem to maintain an authoritative primacy. In other instances of the appointment of a new abbot at the death of former, within Palestine it was common for the abbot themselves to name their successor or for the monks of the monastery to vote for their next abbot. This can be seen in the deaths of both Euthymios and Sabas as well as

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<sup>13</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 102.12-15 πρόνοιαν γὰρ αὐτῶν ἐποιεῖτο πρὸς τὸ ἔχειν αὐτοὺς ἑνδον τὰς ἀναγκαίᾳς χρείας, ἵνα μὴ τούτου ἕνεκεν ἐπὶ τὸν κόσμον ἀναγκάζωνται ἐξιέναι οἱ βου- λόμενοι ἀναχωρεῖν τῶν ἑξῶ θορύβων.

<sup>14</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, in *Kyrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 26.15.

<sup>15</sup> This was the monastery that Theoctistus and Euthymios established together after leaving the *Laura* of Pharan. After some time Euthymios chose to leave the monastery and wander the desert for the sake of *hesychia*, before deciding to return to the area and establish his own *laura* after receiving the command from God. See Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 25.15-25.

<sup>16</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 55.10.

the death of Seridos.<sup>17</sup> The monastery of Theoctistus was considered a branch of Euthymios' laura and under his authority. Cyril confirms this connection in his description of the later splitting of the two monasteries. They continued to have "a common life and one administration under a single steward" for the twelve years following Euthymios' death in 473.<sup>18</sup> However in 485 a dispute arose over donated land when the abbot of Theoctistus' monastery, Paul, claimed it for his own use. This resulted in the breaking up of the two monasteries.

Prior to his own death, two of Euthymios' last actions according to Cyril were to assist in picking his successor and decreeing that the laura should be made into a coenobium. After Euthymios had been given the foresight of his own death, he gathered his monks to him and asked them who they wanted as their next abbot.<sup>19</sup> After first asking for Euthymios' lifelong disciple Domitian and being informed he would die within a week of Euthymios, the monks asked for an individual named Elias. To this Euthymios consented and then informed his successor that God had deemed that the laura should be made into a coenobium. Beyond that it was pleasing to God, Cyril does not provide the reasoning for this significant shift in lifestyle of the monastery, but the monks of the laura accepted Euthymios' command. Euthymios went on to describe "in which place the coenobium should be built and concerning its disposition, the reception of guests, the zeal of the office of psalmody, and to not be neglectful of afflicted

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<sup>17</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 58.20, 25; *Life of Sabas*, 182.20; Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 574. This will be discussed below.

<sup>18</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, in *Kyrrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 226.5. τὰ γὰρ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν Εὐθυμίου καὶ Θεοκτίστου μοναστήρια ἦσαν τότε ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ κοινὸν τὸν βίον ἔχοντα καὶ μίαν διοίκησιν ὑπὸ ἓνα ὄντα οἰκονόμον κατὰ τὴν τοῦ μεγάλου Εὐθυμίου ἐντολήν.

<sup>19</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 58.20.



brothers.”<sup>20</sup> Even on his death bed, Euthymios remained responsible for the administration of his monastery.

Sabas’ administrative role is well documented by Cyril and discussed in scholarship.<sup>21</sup> He was a prolific builder, responsible for establishing nine monasteries (four lauras and five coenobia), penetrating far into the Judean Desert.<sup>22</sup> It was Sabas himself who scouted the locations, secured the funding, oversaw the construction, and appointed the administrators of each of these monasteries. Cyril’s description of Sabas founding the Monastery of the Cave can serve as an example of this process. During one of his Lenten wanderings Sabas took a disciple named Paul with him and eventually came upon a cave in a gorge some fifteen stades from the Great Laura.<sup>23</sup> The two monks stayed in the cave until Palm Sunday and then returned to the Great Laura as was the established tradition. After Easter, Sabas gathered monks together and:

with the assistance of God he made the cave a church, progressively establishing a distinguished coenobium there, which he named ‘of the Cave’. He appointed the blessed Paul administrator of the place, giving to him from the laura three brothers: George, Cyriacus, and Eustathius.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 59-59.5. καὶ διετάξατο ἐν ποίῳ τόπῳ οἰκοδομηθῆναι μέλλει τὸ κοινόβιον καὶ περὶ τῆς τούτου συστάσεως καὶ ξενοδοχίας καὶ τῆς εἰς τὸν τῆς ψαλμωιδίας κανόνα σπουδῆς καὶ περὶ τοῦ μὴ ἀμελεῖν τῶν ἐν θλίψει ἀδελφῶν τῶν μάλιστα ὑπὸ λογισμῶν βαρουμένων.

<sup>21</sup> John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-631* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 161-170; Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, 15-17; Patrich, *Sabas*, 169-196.

<sup>22</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 8, 55. This number does not include the two monasteries he established while exiled from the Great Laura between 503 and 507. The four lauras are: the Great Laura, the New Laura, the Heptastomos Laura, and the Laura of Jeremias. The five coenobia are: the Monastery of Castellion, the Mikron Coenobium, the Monastery of the Cave, the Monastery of Scholararius, and the Monastery of Zannos.

<sup>23</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 126.10.

<sup>24</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 126.17-25. τοῦ θεοῦ συνεργήσαντος τὸ μὲν σπήλαιον ἐκκλησίαν πεποίηκεν, κατὰ δὲ πρόσβασιν κοινόβιον περιφανέστατον αὐτόθι συνεστήσατο τοῦ Σπηλαίου αὐτὸ ἐπονομάσας. καὶ τὸν μὲν μακαρίτην Παῦλον διοικητὴν τοῦ τόπου κατέστησεν παρασχὼν αὐτῷ ἐκ τῆς λαύρας τρεῖς ἀδελφοὺς Γεώργιον καὶ Κυριακὸν καὶ Εὐστάθιον.

Sabas was intimately involved in seeing to the needs of his monks and expanding his monasteries as needed with the growing monastic population of the Judean Desert.<sup>25</sup> Sabas maintained responsibility for both the physical and spiritual welfare of his monasteries and its monks.

In addition to monasteries Sabas also bought and established *xenodochia*, or guesthouses, for use by his monks and visitors when they had to travel.<sup>26</sup> When Sabas' mother died around 491 Sabas used his inheritance to establish two *xenodochia*.<sup>27</sup> The first he built as a part of the Great Laura. The second was established in Jericho which included gardens as well as a water supply for use by its occupants.<sup>28</sup> Several years later Sabas build another *xenodocheion* in one of the gardens he had purchued at Jericho for monks from his monastery at Castellium.<sup>29</sup> He also established another *xenodocheion* for the same monks in Jerusalem, near the Tower of David.<sup>30</sup>

According to Cyril, Sabas alone decided who his successor should be. After falling ill and receiving a vision which showed him his death, Sabas, in the same fashion as Euthymios, gathered his monks around him and gave to them as *hegoumenos* a monk named Melitas.<sup>31</sup> To

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<sup>25</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 10, 203-205.

<sup>26</sup> See Patrich, *Sabas*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 109.15.

<sup>28</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 109.14-16.

<sup>29</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 116.20

<sup>30</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 116.23-26.

<sup>31</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 182.20. δέδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἡγούμενον τινὰ Βηρύτιον μὲν τῷ γένει, Μελιτᾶν δὲ τῇ κλήσει.

him Sabas commanded that he guard the established traditions of the monasteries and gave them to Melitas in the writing.<sup>32</sup>

Along with ensuring the spiritual welfare of the monks of their monastic communities, which Sabas and Euthymios provided due to their own ascetic perfection, these two fathers of the Judean Desert are also presented as remaining responsible for their communities' physical welfare. As abbots of their monasteries, both aspects of their lives are presented by Cyril as being worthy of remembrance and admiration.

### **Barsanuphius and John the Prophet**

In contrast to Euthymios and Sabas, Barsanuphius and John did not take on the position of abbot and the administrative duties that such a role entailed. The Old Men maintained their positions as the spiritual backbone of the community while Seridos carried the title of abbot and its required duties.<sup>33</sup> This distinction can be witnessed when John first arrived at the monastery. John took issue with how Seridos was governing the monastery and attempted to assert his own authority over the monastery. When John wrote to Barsanuphius over these issues he repeatedly admonished John for his actions and urged him to not be concerned with such issues. It was not John's place to worry or fight over those issues, but instead he should focus on his own ascetic development and assisting other monks in their spiritual progress.

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<sup>32</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 182.25. Unfortunately, these written rules have not been preserved in their original form. Two Greek manuscripts dated to the 12-13<sup>th</sup> century (Sin. gr. 1096) and the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Sin. gr. 531) have been preserved in the Monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai. While some elements seem to date back to Sabas, as they are mentioned by Cyril himself, there is also clear additions. See Patrich, *Sabas*, 255-257; Kurtz, "A. Dmitrievskij, 'Die Klosterregeln des hl. Sabbas,'" *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* Vol. 3 1894.

<sup>33</sup> Neyt, "A Form of Charismatic Authority," 62; Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony & Aryeh Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, v. 3 (Boston: Brill, 2004), 82-106.

In one such letter Barsanuphius confirms the importance of Seridos' position as abbot by describing him as the one who “protects us after God.”<sup>34</sup> Barsanuphius continues by telling John that he should be thanking and praying for the preservation of Seridos from evil for their own benefit and that of the community.<sup>35</sup> While Barsanuphius wielded his own substantial spiritual authority, he still recognized the importance of Seridos as abbot and the authority that such a position held. It was because of Seridos and his willingness to deal with and maintain a connection with the world that Barsanuphius and John could live a life of *hesychia*.

Barsanuphius admonished John over his quarrels with Seridos for this exact reason, asking him if he had forgotten “the settlement which you share in stillness as a king, while he bears the burden of those coming and going from us, making us undisturbed?”<sup>36</sup> Barsanuphius and eventually John, recognized the distinction between their positions and that of Seridos and the benefits of that distinction for their asceticism. Within Barsanuphius’ understanding the administrative authority of the abbot was a burden that Seridos took on for the benefit of the Old Men. It was Seridos’ monastery in which the Old Men lived as spiritual directors.

Barsanuphius and John also strove to enforce the position of the abbot within the monastic hierarchy.<sup>37</sup> A monk who was having trouble with his passions was ashamed to confide in Seridos, so he secretly sent a letter to John asking if he would receive him without the abbot’s knowledge. The editor states that this troubled John because he did not want to talk with the

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<sup>34</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 48 τῷ μετὰ τὸν Θεὸν σκεπάζοντι ἡμᾶς.

<sup>35</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 48 Ἀλλὰ τοῦ καθίσματος, οὗ μετέχεις ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ ὡς βασιλεὺς. Καὶ αὐτὸς τὸ βάρος τῶν ἐρχομένων πρὸς ἡμᾶς καὶ ἀπερχομένων βαστάζει, καὶ ἀνενοχλήτους ἡμᾶς ποιεῖ.

<sup>37</sup> Neyt, “A Form of Charismatic Authority,” 58.

monk without the abbot's consent.<sup>38</sup> A similar situation occurred in a later letter. A monk had several thoughts but did not want Seridos to know so wrote them in the form of riddles. While Barsanuphius responded to these questions, he also commanded the monk to not ask in this way again as it was not the path of humility.<sup>39</sup>

Letters 550 and 551 reveal Barsanuphius supporting the authority of Seridos. A group of monks had left Seridos' monastery and purchased cells for themselves in a nearby region without asking the abbot's permission. Seridos was upset over this and was considering exiling them. Barsanuphius was asked what should be done to which he responded that the monks had acted disrespectfully. They should be required to return to Seridos and ask for his forgiveness and he should allow them to stay. In another instance, Seridos had ordered some monks to perform a task, but they refused and complained about the order. When Barsanuphius learned of this, he composed a letter to the disobedient monks. He stated that if a monk is a true disciple then that person "will obey his abbot in everything until death."<sup>40</sup> Otherwise, the monk is projecting his own will over that of the abbot which would make the monk a "son of the devil."<sup>41</sup> Barsanuphius then makes the point that if a monk truly knows better than the abbot, then there is no reason for them to continue to be a disciple of the abbot. Instead that monk should go off and gather his own disciples.

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<sup>38</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 54 μήτε θέλων δέξασθαι αὐτὸν δίχα γνώμης.

<sup>39</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 137B.

<sup>40</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 551 Εἴ τις οὖν ἀληθινὸς μαθητὴς ἐστίν, ἐν πᾶσιν ὑπακούει τῷ ἀββᾷ αὐτοῦ ἕως θανάτου.

<sup>41</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 551 Εἴ τις οὖν θέλει τὸ ἴδιον θέλημα στήσαι, υἱός, ἐστὶ τοῦ διαβόλου.

In the same manner as Euthymios and Sabas it was Seridos, rather than the Old Men, who prepared a list of successors as abbot of the monastery.<sup>42</sup> It was his responsibility to ensure that the monastery continued to be properly administrated after his death. Not only did Seridos name his next successor, but the list was meant to serve as a line of succession.<sup>43</sup> The ancient editor goes out of their way to clarify this point, ensuring that readers not think the listed monks were meant to serve concurrently. He states that Seridos had made a list of multiple individuals “not in order that they administer together—since this would be the cause of disorder—but in order that after the first in line died he would be succeeded by the second.”<sup>44</sup> While the positions of Barsanuphius and John were important for the spiritual welfare of the monastery. They should not be understood as co-abbots or of a similar authority. Seridos was the only abbot of the monastery of Seridos while Barsanuphius and John were spiritual directors. They were distinctive positions, a single abbot with the possibility of multiple directors in a single monastery.

The Old Men’s conservation of the distinction and importance of the position of abbot can be seen after the death of Seridos. When the monks looked at his list of possible successors the listed monks, one by one, began to deny the position of abbot out of humility. At the end of the list was a layman named Aelianos, which Seridos had added on the stipulation that he would become a monk. With the other possible successors denying the position, Aelianos—at the urging of John—became a monk and accepted the position of abbot. Shortly after this occurred

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<sup>42</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 574.

<sup>43</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 574.

<sup>44</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 574. ἐνεστήσατο κληρονόμους τοὺς πρώτους τῶν ἀδελφῶν, οὐχ ὥστε πάντα ὁμοῦ διοικεῖν, ἐπειδὴ τοῦτο ἀκαταστασίας αἴτιον γίνεται, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τάξιν τὸν πρῶτον καὶ τελευτῶντος αὐτοῦ τὸν δεύτερον καὶ οὕτω τοὺς λοιποὺς καθ’ ἐξῆς.

Aelianos went to John who let him in the cell and requested that the newly appointed abbot pray for him.<sup>45</sup> Aelianos was taken back that the elder would want him, a newly made monk, to pray for him but he eventually consented. While on a spiritual level Aelianos was nowhere near the spiritual authority that John was, because he now held the position of abbot John recognized his administrative authority and placed himself under him as he had with Seridos. While in regards to spiritual authority Seridos is presented as submitting himself to Barsanuphius, he maintained the administrative authority over the monastery. When it came to the care and maintenance of the monastery the Old Men submitted themselves to Seridos. It was this division of authority that allowed the Old Men to practice their fully enclosed life of *hesychia*.

As the above sections have shown, the disparities between the roles of Sabas and Barsanuphius were not a reflection on the conception of monasticism as a whole in the regions of the Judean Desert and Gaza. Instead, these differences are reflective of the specific roles that these individual monks held. Sabas and Euthymios concurrently held both administrative and spiritual authority as abbots and spiritual directors. This was not the case with Barsanuphius and John. The fact that the Old Men of Gaza were not abbots and did not wield administrative authority means that comparison to Euthymios or Sabas is unbalanced. The expressions of monastic authority would not seem similar because of these distinctions, rather due to the differences between the Judean Desert and Gaza. With this in mind, a far better comparison would be found in the lives of John the Hesychast and Cyriacus of the Judean Desert. As with the Old Men, these monks were perfected and spiritual directors without taking on the mantle of abbot. They instead remained focused on the spiritual welfare of their own communities and disciples.

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<sup>45</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 575B.

## John the Hesychast and Cyriacus

A brief biographical sketch will help point out the similarities between Barsanuphius and John the Hesychast. John was born around 453/4 in the city of Nicopolis in Armenia. When he was eighteen, he built a church in the city with an attached coenobium in which he began his monastic life. In 481 he was appointed bishop of Colonia where he served nine years until, due to conflict with his brother-in-law, the governor of Armenia, he decided to flee his see and retreat to Palestine to live again as a monk. John then entered the Great Laura in 491.<sup>46</sup> In 492/3 he was made guest-master and cook which he held for a year.<sup>47</sup> John then began a life of *hesychia*, remaining in his cell for five days and coming together with the other monks for services during the weekend. He maintained this lifestyle for three years and then Sabas appointed John steward (οικονομίαν) of the laura, which he held for a year.<sup>48</sup> It was then in 498/9 that John began living a hesychastic life of complete enclosure, “neither going to church nor meeting with anyone except the one that served him.”<sup>49</sup> In 503, when Sabas was forced into exile from the Great Laura, John also left and retired to a cave in Rouba where he remained until 509 when Sabas brought him back to the Great Laura and enclosed him in a cell.<sup>50</sup> John lived as a hesychast in this cell for thirty-eight years, until 547 when the Origenist George temporarily became abbot of the Great Laura. John fled to the Mount of Olives for the seven months that George remained in power and then returned to his cell and life of stillness until his death in 558.

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<sup>46</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 204.20.

<sup>47</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 206.

<sup>48</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 207.

<sup>49</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 208.25-209. καὶ ἀπὸ τότε ἡσύχαζεν εἰς τὸ κελλίον αὐτοῦ μήτε εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν προερχόμενος μήτε τινὶ τὸ σύνολον συντυγχάνων παρεκτός τοῦ διακονοῦντος αὐτῷ

<sup>50</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 212.25



During John's time as a hesychast he maintained a status as a spiritual director and holy man.<sup>51</sup> As was the case with Barsanuphius and John the Prophet, John the Hesychast's authority lay in the spiritual realm due to his ascetic perfection. Except for the two nonconsecutive years that he spent as guest-master and steward John did not wield administrative power and was not involved in the day to day decisions of running the Great Laura.

Cyriacus' life had a similar pattern in his progression towards an anchoritic life of *hesychia*.<sup>52</sup> Cyriacus also held the position of steward for one year at the Laura of Souka.<sup>53</sup> In addition he served as the baker, infirmarian, and guest-master for a single year and then treasurer and canonarch for thirty-one years during his first tenure at the Laura of Souka.<sup>54</sup> While he did not take on a greater administrative role, Cyriacus, as with John, took on the role of spiritual director and holy man. After his thirty-five years in the laura he reached—or at least got close to—perfection and sought a further removal from human contact. He transitioned to a desert cell in Natoupha with a disciple and it was here that he began to preform miraculous healings.<sup>55</sup> This caused a number of lay individuals to seek him out for healings, which caused him to repeat his flight to more removed deserted regions two more times before agreeing to return to Souka

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<sup>51</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 169.

<sup>52</sup> A biographic sketch will be provided in the Monastic Mobility chapter below.

<sup>53</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 226.25. καὶ πληροὶ τέσσαρας ἐν διαφόροις ἔτεσιν διακονίας τήν τε τοῦ ἀρτοκοπέου καὶ τοῦ νοσοκομείου καὶ τοῦ ξενοδοχείου καὶ τοῦ οἰκονομείου καὶ πάντας τοὺς πατέρας θεραπεύσας.

<sup>54</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 227.1 ἐν τῷ τοσούτῳ τῶν τριάκοντα ἐνὸς χρόνων κανονάρχην με ὄντα καὶ κειμηλιάρχην οὐκ εἶδέν με ὁ ἥλιος ἐσθίοντα οὐδὲ ὀργιζόμενον.

<sup>55</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 228.09-13.

where he took up residence in the sanctified hanging cave of Chariton.<sup>56</sup> Cyriacus had clearly reached a degree of spiritual mastery and authority which coincided with the abbot of Souka.

In Cyril's narrative, after the death of Sabas the abbots of the Great Laura are presented as largely having to deal with the second Origenist controversy and the imperial fallout which accompanied it.<sup>57</sup> Gelasius, who served as abbot from 537 to 546, in particular spent much of his tenure dealing with these issues. It was in fact the intrigues surrounding the Origenists that caused Gelasius' death. The abbot went to Constantinople in an attempt to inform Justinian of the issues that the Origenists were causing in Palestine and seek aid.<sup>58</sup> However, the Origenist Theodore Ascidas ensured that Gelasius was blocked from being received by anyone.<sup>59</sup> At this point Gelasius decided to return to Palestine on foot and died along the way.

During this time of struggle, Cyril does not mention John the Hesychast being involved in any major aspect of this controversy. The only thing mentioned is that John sent Cyril with some letters to Cyriacus at Souka "recounting the public war occurring in the holy city and importuning him to now struggle in advocacy for God to quickly put down the raging of those in the New Laura with Nonnus and Leontius."<sup>60</sup> Beyond this, Cyril's next mention of John's

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<sup>56</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 229.05-08.

<sup>57</sup> On the Second Origenist Controversy See Daniël Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy: A New Perspective on Cyril of Scythopolis' Monastic Biographies as Historical Sources for Sixth-Century Origenism* (Roma: Centro studi SAnselmo, 2001).

<sup>58</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 194.25-195.5

<sup>59</sup> Ascidas was the abbot of the New Laura initially. He traveled to Constantinople in 536 for the Home Synod and was then ordained bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia in 537. Cyril depicts Ascidas as one of the leading Origenist 'villains' of the Second Origenist Controversy. See Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 188.25-189.10, 191.23, 192.22, 194.29, 197.19, 198.8.

<sup>60</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 229.10-15. μετὰ γραμμάτων διηγουμένων περὶ τοῦ γεγονότος ἐν τῇ ἁγίᾳ πόλει δημοσίου πολέμου καὶ δυσωπούντων αὐτὸν νῦν ἀγωνίσασθαι ἐν ταῖς πρὸς θεὸν πρεσβείαις πρὸς τὸ ἐν

involvement in this controversy is, as mentioned above, him leaving the Great Laura in 547 when the Origenist George was elected abbot and only returning when he had died.<sup>61</sup>

A similar pattern appeared during the tenure of the next ‘orthodox’ abbot of the Great Laura, Conon, who was elected in 548. The continued struggle with the Origenists in Palestine caused Conon, as Gelasius had done, to be part of a group to travel to Constantinople in the hopes of gaining imperial aid around 451/2. According to Cyril, Conan’s party was able to convince Justinian to exile the newly appointed ‘Origenist’ patriarch of Jerusalem Macarius and on their recommendation ordained Eustochius as patriarch.<sup>62</sup> It was also, according to Cyril, because of these issues that the second council of Constantinople (553) was called for.<sup>63</sup> Cyril states that Conon remained in Constantinople for the council itself, requesting that the newly appoint patriarch send additional bishops and abbots to support their cause. John the Hesychast was not among those who went to the council, nor is he described as involved in any aspect of the controversy. The next mention of John was when Eustochius expelled the monks of the New Laura for not consenting to the decrees of the council. The patriarch sought to repopulate the laura with orthodox monks and John told Cyril that it was time for him to transition from the coenobium to the laura. According to Cyril’s depiction of the events, John remained invested in serving as a spiritual director for monks of the Judean Desert, but left the administrative and controversial elements to the abbots of his monastery.

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τάχει κατα- βληθῆναι τὸ φρύαγμα τῶν ἐν τῇ Νέαι λαύραι μετὰ Νόννου καὶ Λεοντίου. This seems to have taken place in 546.

<sup>61</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 195.20.

<sup>62</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 198.10-20.

<sup>63</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 198.20-21.

The position of spiritual director that John the Hesychast and Cyriacus held had more in common with that of Barsanuphius and John the Prophet than that of Euthymios and Sabas. These four monastic elders of the Judean Desert and Gaza never took on the position of *hegoumenos* and the administrative duties that the position held. The expressed differences in the lives of Sabas and Euthymios were not a reflection of monastic variations of the Judean Desert and Gaza, but instead between the positions that the key figures held.

### **The Uniqueness of the Monastery of Seridos**

It has been suggested that within the Monastery of Seridos a unique form of spiritual authority was present during tenure of the Old Men of Gaza and Seridos. This point is made in particular by Jennifer Hevelone-Harper who describes it as follows:

“Spiritual authority in this community was a cooperative endeavor. Three men exercised spiritual leadership in Tawatha: the Great Old Man, Barsanuphius the Other Old Man, John; and the abbot of the cenobium, Seridos. This rule by three spiritual fathers set monastery at Tawatha apart; most monasteries in Egypt and Palestine were governed by a single abbot. In some cases an anchorite would found a monastery, appoint an abbot to direct monks there, and then withdraw to a more remote cell. However, Barsanuphius and John remained intimately involved with the community at Tawatha than did most anchorites associated with cenobia.”<sup>64</sup>

There are two connected elements within the statement which I will contend with in the following section: the uniqueness of cooperative spiritual authority and the unique quality of Barsanuphius and John remaining more involved within the community than other spiritual directors.

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<sup>64</sup> Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 36; Neyt, “A Form of Charismatic Authority,” 63.

## Cooperative Authority

Euthymios' involvement in the founding and early years of the coenobium of Theoctistus serves as an excellent instance of cooperative authority. After coming to Palestine Euthymios first spent five years (406-411) in the Laura of Pharan and became united in “spiritual affection” (πνεύματος στοργῇ) with a neighboring monk named Theoctistus with whom he went on Lenten wanderings to the desert of Coutila.<sup>65</sup> In 411, during one of their wanderings, the two monks found a gorge and decided to establish their own monastery. Due to the difficulty in navigating the terrain of the area, especially at night, the two decided to make their monastery a coenobium rather than a laura as they had originally planned.<sup>66</sup> Out of his hatred for glory and desire to remain as if a stranger Euthymios requested that Theoctistus take on the role of abbot.<sup>67</sup> Euthymios remained at the monastery, living a life of *hesychia* and was a “doctor of souls healing and encouraging each [monk], and none of the brothers refrained from confessing their thoughts to him.”<sup>68</sup> Euthymios also helped to establish rules regarding the need for silence during church services and meal times as well as admonishing monks over too severe forms of fasting.<sup>69</sup> It seems then that Euthymios and Theoctistus developed a form of cooperative authority over their first monastery, and one that was quite similar to Seridos' relationship with Barsanuphius.

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<sup>65</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 14.22. See the Monastic Mobility chapter below on these wanderings.

<sup>66</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 15.14, 17. Cyril Describes the gorge as “extremely steep and impassable” (βαθύτατον λίαν καὶ δύσβατον). If the monastery was made into a laura, then the monks would have needed to traverse the area when they traveled from their cells to the central church every Saturday and Sunday. It was for this reason that Euthymios and Theoctistus deemed it as too dangerous.

<sup>67</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 16.15-17.

<sup>68</sup> Euthymios, *Life of Euthymius*, 17-17.5 ὁ μέγας Εὐθύμιος ἦν ἱατρὸς ψυχῶν θεραπεύων καὶ παραμυθούμενος ἕκαστον, καὶ οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐφείδετο ὁμολογῆσαι αὐτῷ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ διάνοιαν.

<sup>69</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 18-18.10.

While we do not possess direct evidence as that previously discussed, I would tentatively suggest that John the Hesychast maintained a similar form of shared authority with Sabas and the other abbots of the Great Laura. He maintained his own disciples and was visited by both monks and lay individuals seeking healing and advice. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Cyril presented himself as a disciple of John throughout his time in the Judean Desert. It was specifically to John that Cyril submitted himself on his arrival to the region. It was John who told Cyril to enter the Coenobium of Euthymios and then punished him for his disobedience. Finally, it was to John that Cyril continued to visit, despite the distance between their monasteries, for counsel throughout his monastic career. In addition to the author himself, Cyril mentions other disciples of John in several instances. Two of the disciples were named Theodore and John who John the Hesychast had sent on business to Livias.<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, Cyril also mentions that John's disciples would visit Cyril's family home in Scythopolis as if was a hospice and receive an annual offering for the Great Laura and for John himself."<sup>71</sup> Cyril presented his family as being devoted to John.<sup>72</sup> It was for this reason that Cyril's mother told him to submit himself to John when he transitioned to the Judean Desert. One brief reference does suggest the presence of this shared spiritual authority between John and the abbot of the Great Laura. When Gelasius became the third abbot of the Great Laura in 537 he decided it was necessary to move against the Origenists that had formed in the Great Laura. Cyril mentions that he shared the views of John

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<sup>70</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 215.10

<sup>71</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 217.15.

<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, Cyril reported that this was the one fact that he kept hidden from John after he had become his disciple.

the Hesychast and decided to read Antipatrus of Bostra's work against the doctrines of Origen aloud in the church.<sup>73</sup>

These instances place John in a similar role as that portrayed—albeit with more detail—as that of Barsanuphius and John. The presence of spiritually advanced or perfected monks living alongside and in conjunction with the abbot of a monastery was a feature of Palestine, particularly in the combined monasteries and *lauras*. While Cyril chose to not give much information on Cyriacus' time at the Laura of Souka, his status as a holy man and his later occupation of the hanging cave of Chariton suggests that it would not be unreasonable to see him as having held a similar position.

In regard to the notion of the cooperative authority of three individuals rather than just two, a few things are worth mentioning. The first is related to the chronology of this development within Seridos' monastery. As mentioned elsewhere, while the date by which Barsanuphius first arrived at Tawatha is cloudy, it has generally been accepted that he arrived sometime around the first decade of the sixth century.<sup>74</sup> More reliably we know that John took up his anchoritic cell at Seridos' monastery around 525.<sup>75</sup> We also know that John died sometime around 543. So then the triumvirate, at max, lasted a period of twenty-two years. Due to their nature, Cyril's works span much longer time frames, across multiple monasteries in a more condensed form. Rather than argue that shared authority between three was something unique to

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<sup>73</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 189.10-25

<sup>74</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 6; Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 36-37.

<sup>75</sup> Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, "The Letter Collection of Barsanuphius and John." In *Late antique letter collections: a critical introduction and reference guide*, eds. Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, Edward J. Watts (University of California Press, 2016), 418-19.

the Monastery of Seridos, it seems instead to be something that can be witnessed because of the nature of the source itself.

The tripartite spiritual authority of Seridos' monastery was a byproduct of the Palestinian monastic system rather than something distinctive of the monastery or Gaza. *Hesychia* remained an enticing path for advanced monks seeking perfection. However, such a path also made adopting the position of abbot difficult to maintain if not undesirable for the ascetically minded monk.<sup>76</sup> For that reason we have witnessed the multiple instances of the diffusion of spiritual authority between abbots and spiritual directors. The presence of John the Prophet in Gaza can be seen as a disciple who had advanced to the status of spiritual father, but out of humility remained under the auspices of his master. Euthymios is described as having a similar disciple. A monk by the name of Domitian remained—as far as Cyril allows us to ascertain—with Euthymios for over sixty years. He was the sole disciple Euthymios took with him when he left the Monastery of Theoctistus and settled with him when he founded his own laura. Domitian in fact served as the first steward of Euthymios' laura.<sup>77</sup> When Euthymios foresaw his own death and asked his community who they wanted as their next abbot, Domitian was unanimously asked for, however, Euthymios had also foreseen that his long time disciple would die within a week of him; God allowing them to remain together.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter Two above for a discussion of this.

<sup>77</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 27.5-10.

<sup>78</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 58.20-25.



### Involvement of Spiritual Directors

If we compare Barsanuphius' involvement as a spiritual director at Seridos' monastery with figures from the Judean Desert a similar level can be witnessed. As mentioned above John the Hesychast remained in his cell at the Great Laura for thirty-eight years between 509 and 547, serving as a spiritual director for monks of the Judean Desert. He then only left for a period of seven months before returning to his cell for another decade until his death. During this period John counseled novice monks first arriving in Palestine as witnessed in Cyril's experiences.<sup>79</sup> He maintained his own disciples, hearing and advising them concerning their ascetic praxis.<sup>80</sup> John also had the authority to send them on business. John also received lay visitors and preformed miracles. As far as Cyril described John's life, he remained involved in the spiritual welfare of the Great Laura and the surrounding communities just as Barsanuphius and John the Prophet were concurrently doing.

Cyriacus likewise remained involved as a spiritual director at the Laura of Souka. He remained at the laura for forty years, between 485 and 525.<sup>81</sup> Cyril mentions that Cyriacus also maintained his own disciples.<sup>82</sup> He also accepted visits from monks seeking a word and advice, as evidenced by Cyril himself who stated "I in my lowliness was often visiting him and reaping much benefit for my soul."<sup>83</sup> These elements, in conjunction with his long term as treasurer and canonarch, suggest that Cyriacus remained a vital authority at the Laura of Souka.

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<sup>79</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 216.10-20.

<sup>80</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 217.10-15, 218.10-20.

<sup>81</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 226.24-227.5

<sup>82</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 229.16

<sup>83</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 232.4, 234.28-29. ἐν οἷς σπηλαίῳ διάγοντος αὐτοῦ ἐγὼ ὁ ταπεινὸς πυκνῶς παρέβαλλον αὐτῷ καὶ πολλὴν τῇ ψυχῇ μου ὠφέλειαν ἐκαρπούμην.

As *hegoumenos* Sabas remained involved in the care of his monasteries, especially the Great Laura.<sup>84</sup> We are told that Sabas began accepting disciples in the gorge that would develop into his laura around 483. He then remained attached to this monastery for roughly eighteen years (until 501), only temporarily leaving the laura itself to found additional coenobia—such as Castellium—which were generally scouted during his Lenten wanderings. During these years he did eventually build a more solitary tower for himself, however it was in fact connected to the laura’s church and he did not take the additional step of completely withdrawing. When he did depart from the Great Laura in 501 it was not out of his own desire but originated out of conflict with a subgroup of combative monks. This exile seems to be an example of a spiritual authority losing control over his monastery rather than one undertaken out of a personal desire to distance oneself from the monastery.<sup>85</sup> Following this exile, Sabas in fact returned to the laura and then left again finding the faction of monks grown and still unable to reassert his authority. These periods of exile do not seem to have lasted an extended period as Cyril tells us that Sabas had regained his authority over the Great Laura, kicked out the dissenting monks, and then decided to help build them a new monastery all before 507. While Sabas did found and move on from his other monasteries he remained attached to the Great Laura and its nearby coenobium.

In fact, as Patrich has expertly argued, it appears—at least according to Cyril—that Sabas maintained his authority as *hegoumenos* (ἡγούμενος) not only over the Great Laura but over all his established monasteries.<sup>86</sup> The heads of the other monasteries are referred to simply as *dioikēsis* (διοικήτης); an administrator subordinate to Sabas. Only the New Laura is described as

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<sup>84</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 170.

<sup>85</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 197-202.

<sup>86</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 170-73.

having its own *hegoumenos*, which given the events surrounding the establishment of that monastery makes sense. Proceeding in the opposite direction, the Mikron Coenobium did not have its own *dioikēsis* or *hegoumenos* but was instead entirely under the authority of Sabas and the Great Laura. The Mikron Coenobium was founded just to the north of the Great Laura by Sabas around 492/3 as a place to train novice monk. In this manner the Mikron Coenobium seems to have been understood as a branch of the Great Laura rather than its own monastery. This monastic system can be seen as an evolution of the combined monastery of Gerasimus or Seridos in which the coenobium was encircled by anchoritic cells.<sup>87</sup> Sabas maintained the distance between laura and coenobium but kept them connected under his own authority, allowing for a smooth transition for advanced monks.

Euthymios likewise remain attached to his laura after founding it. Other than the annual Lenten wanderings, Cyril only mention of Euthymios leaving his monastery for an extended period was the two years he lived in self-imposed exile in Rouba between 451-3 in response to the Palestinian revolt against the council of Chalcedon. Otherwise Euthymios appears to have remained involved in the administrative and spiritual welfare of his laura during his forty-five-year tenure as *hegoumenos*. In addition to his administrative duties described above Euthymios also remained a spiritual director. For instance when two monks named Maron and Clematius of the laura had made plans to secretly leave the monastery, their plan was revealed to Euthymios while he was in solitude and he immediately summoned them. He admonished their actions and urged the monks to resist demonic impulses urging them to hate their own monastery and their companions.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 356.

<sup>88</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 30.5-15.

The uniqueness of the Monastery of Seridos lies with the nature of the surviving sources. Rather than Tawatha representing a completely distinct form of monasticism, this is a case of possessing a broader historical image of individuals of the Judean Desert in comparison to the chronologically brief but deep image of Barsanuphius and John. At maximum, the surviving 850 letters of Barsanuphius and John represent a chronological period of forty-three years while those specifically involving John only eighteen years. When compared in equal twenty year spans the special characteristics of Tawatha in comparison to the monasteries of the Judean Desert is lessened. We know, based on the authoritative positions they were able to adopt at Tawatha, that both Barsanuphius and John began their monastic careers elsewhere. Quite possibly they founded other monasteries like Sabas had, we unfortunately just do not have the evidence. What this exercise can tell us, however, is that there are more similarities between the monastic communities of the Judean desert and Gaza than scholars to date have recognized. The chronologically brief time frame of the letters of Barsanuphius and John reveal the uniqueness of Palestinian monasticism as a whole rather than something to distinguish Gaza from the Judean Desert.

### **Conclusion**

Due to the nature of the surviving sources, scholars have tended to use Euthymios and especially Sabas as the monastic figures by which our image of monasticism in the Judean Desert has been constructed and how this construction compares to that of Gaza as exemplified by Barsanuphius and John the Prophet. However, the forms of authority that these figures wielded varied significantly. As abbots Euthymios and Sabas held both administrative and spiritual authority within their communities. They were responsible for additional administrative duties for the benefit and prosperity of their monasteries. What was expected

from them and how Cyril went about constructing their lives varied significantly from monks that maintained their authority only as spiritual directors. The Old Men of Gaza along with John the Hesychast and Cyriacus were never abbots, their authority remained spiritual in origin and thus their literary portrayals focused on their own asceticism and their ability to pass along spiritual wisdom.

By using Sabas and Barsanuphius as litmus tests by which to compare monasticism in the Judean Desert and Gaza, an unbalanced vision has been created. One in which Judean Desert monasticism has been painted as an organizationally minded institution forgoing personal asceticism in favor of imperial orthodoxy and patriarchate loyalty. This image stands in contrapose with that of Gaza as a form of monasticism that maintained the importance of personal asceticism and spiritual growth. This image of the Judean Desert has been created at the expense of the expressions of asceticism and personal spiritual development which lay underneath the facade of the constructed image of Sabas as the ‘builder’ and throughout Cyril’s lives. These distinctions are a reflection of the authoritative positions these monks held within their communities and the duties that were expected of them, not a reflection on monasticism for the entire region.

The monastic communities of both the Judean Desert and Gaza continued to produce and feature perfected monks who wielded spiritual authority throughout the region due to their personal asceticism and holiness. The emphasized distinctions between these two regions of Palestine has been the product of comparing individuals in different roles. When Barsanuphius and John are instead examined next to John the Hesychast and Cyriacus we can witness similar positions and emphasis on personal spirituality and ascetic growth. The uniqueness of Seridos’

monastery was an expression of the unique qualities of Palestinian monasticism as a whole rather than of the qualities of the monastery in Gaza individually.

## Chapter 4. Theology and the Monastic Life

As with much of the eastern Mediterranean, theological controversies held a central place within sixth-century Palestine. The disputes following the Council of Chalcedon (451) as well as the second Origenist controversy in the mid-sixth century both played a prominent role throughout the region. Due to the importance of these debates for late antique Christianity, much scholarly discussion has centered on doctrinal loyalty within the Palestinian literature; questions of what these sources can reveal about the dispute at large and on which side the authors and examined figures sat. These theological divisions—specifically those concerning Chalcedon—are presented in scholarship as a central reason for the division between the Judean Desert and Gaza.<sup>1</sup> The former is understood as remaining firmly in the Chalcedonian camp, following the Patriarch of Jerusalem and the latter non-Chalcedonian, in line with Egypt. Rather than view the role that Palestine and its monks played within the empire wide controversies, the chapter will instead view the place that the controversies played within the personal and spiritual lives of Palestinian monks in the sixth century.

To that end, the chapter will examine the place of theological study within asceticism and the impact of doctrinal controversy on the monastic life as expressed in the literature of

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 17; Jan-Eric Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), xxxiv, 25, 111; Cornelia Horn and Robert Phenix, *John Rufus : Lives of Peter the Iberian, Theodosius of Jerusalem, and the Monk Romanus* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008): xlviii-xlix; David Mezynski, “The Effects of the Origenist Controversy on the Pastoral Theology of Barsanuphius and John,” (PhD Diss., Fordham University, 2012), 26; Daniël Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy: A New Perspective on Cyril of Scythopolis’ Monastic Biographies as Historical Sources for Sixth-Century Origenism* (Roma: Centro studi SAnselmo, 2001), 32; Lorenzo Perrone, “Byzantine Monasticism in Gaza and the Judean Desert: A Comparison of their Spiritual Traditions.” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 62 (2012): 11-12; Samuel Rubenson, “The Egyptian Relations of Early Palestinian Monasticism,” in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, eds. Anthony O’Mahony, Göran Gunner, Kevork Hintlian (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995): 44. In regards to the second Origenist controversy, all the examined sources in both the Judean Desert and Gaza were anti-Origenist.

Palestine. While not denying the variations which did exist—as will be discussed below—this methodology reveals the continuities between the Judean Desert and Gaza which can provide an alternative vision of the monastic communities of Palestine. Theological identity remained an important aspect of the Christian in the Judean Desert, but debating over the intricacies of doctrine was not. The chapter argues that the practice of theological speculation was not part of the monastic life in Palestine; it was not an emphasized activity for the monk. Both Cyril of Scythopolis and the Old Men of Gaza saw theologizing and confrontation over doctrine as a worldly distraction from asceticism. Instead, if needed, God illuminated the proper faith through prayers and miracles.

### **Background**

To help contextualize the debates over theological speculation with which the chapter is concerned with, this section will provide brief overviews of the historical narratives of the Council of Chalcedon and the Second Origenist Controversy in Palestine.

Following the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Christian population of Palestine erupted in insurrection. This was brought about by an abrupt volte-face by Juvenal, Bishop of Jerusalem (422-458), who had shifted his support away from Dioscorus,<sup>2</sup> Bishop of Alexandria, and consented to the Chalcedonian creed.<sup>3</sup> On Juvenal's return to Palestine he was met with anger. Several monks, including a certain Theodosios, had attended the council and then rushed back before Juvenal to reveal its outcome. In response to Juvenal's backing of the Chalcedonian creed,

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<sup>2</sup>Dioscorus, Bishop of Alexandria (444-451), was deposed, excommunicated, and exiled to Gangra by the Council of Chalcedon. He had served as an archdeacon under Cyril of Alexandria and became an ardent supporter of Eutyches.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Honigmann, "Juvenal of Jerusalem." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950): 242-245.



a group of angered clergy and monks, among whom was Peter the Iberian, met him along the road near to Caesarea and urged him to reconsider his acceptance of the new creed.<sup>4</sup> Juvenal's refusal to rescind his acceptance of Chalcedon prompted threats of assassination which convinced him to withdraw to Constantinople to seek imperial assistance.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime the non-Chalcedonian rebels elected the aforementioned Theodosios as patriarch of Jerusalem. He then proceeded to depose Palestinian bishops and appoint non-Chalcedonians in their stead.<sup>6</sup> It was at this time that Peter the Iberian was ordained bishop of Maiuma.<sup>7</sup> During this period of non-Chalcedonian control, the few monastic Chalcedonian supporters, amongst whom were Euthymios and Gerasimus, supposedly retreated to the inner desert to avoid conflict.

Theodosios remained patriarch for twenty months, until the middle of 453. In February 453 the Emperor Marcian issued a decree expelling all bishops that Theodosios had appointed and sentenced him to death.<sup>8</sup> In response Theodosios fled to a monastery on Mt. Sinai.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Juvenal returned to Jerusalem in the summer of 453 accompanied by imperial forces. However, the success of Theodosios, in addition to the sources themselves, seem to confirm that most of the monastic population of Palestine were initially against Chalcedon and only slowly accepted the new creed. From the outset, the region around Gaza was a center of non-Chalcedonian

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<sup>4</sup> Honingmann, "Juvenal," 249. John Rufus, Horn trans., *Life of Peter the Iberian*, 111.

<sup>5</sup> Honingmann, "Juvenal," 249.

<sup>6</sup> Honingmann, "Juvenal," 249-50.

<sup>7</sup> Horn trans., *John Rufus*, 113-117.

<sup>8</sup> Honingmann, "Juvenal," 253.

<sup>9</sup> Theodosios subsequently fled to Egypt and then Antioch where he was recognized and captured. He was sent to Constantinople where Marcian imprisoned him in a cell at the Monastery of Dios which was filled with unslaked lime (calcium oxide). When Leo became emperor in 457 Theodosios was released but died several days later. See Honingmann, "Juvenal," 257.

resistance up through the early years of the sixth century.<sup>10</sup> Peter the Iberian helped to lead the non-Chalcedonians and maintained his position at Maiuma for six months until the depositions of 453. While he was saved from exile thanks to the intervention by the Empress Pulcheria, he decided to follow his non-Chalcedonian compatriots to Alexandria.<sup>11</sup> He returned to Palestine sometime in the mid-460s or early 470s, serving as a public holy man and non-Chalcedonian missionary throughout the region until his death in 491.<sup>12</sup> As mentioned in the first chapter, it was during the last decade of the fifth century that Severus of Antioch arrived in the region and entered into the monastery of Peter the Iberian.<sup>13</sup> After spending around a decade as a coenobitic, anchoritic, and semi-anchoritic monk, Severus founded his own monastery in the region and gained acclaim as a non-Chalcedonian leader. After the expulsion of non-Chalcedonian Palestinian monks from their monasteries in 508 Severus departed for Constantinople to seek imperial aid where he became embroiled in ecclesiastical politics, leading to his appointment as bishop of Antioch in 512.<sup>14</sup>

Following Juvenal's return all subsequent patriarchs of Jerusalem continued to support Chalcedon. Euthymios returned to his laura sometime in 454 after Juvenal had regained control. As will be discussed below, Cyril reports that it was through Euthymios' actions that Eudocia was brought into the Chalcedonian camp. Moving forward the Judean Desert is presented as

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<sup>10</sup> Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, "Gazan Monasticism in the Fourth-Sixth Centuries from Anchoritic to Cenobitic," *Proche-Orient Chretien* 50, no. 1–2 (2000): 43.

<sup>11</sup> Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony & Aryeh Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture, v. 3 (Boston: Brill, 2004), 53.

<sup>12</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *Monastic School of Gaza*, 53.

<sup>13</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *Monastic School of Gaza*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *Monastic School of Gaza*, 35.

largely Chalcedonian. Sabas and his co-archimandrite Theodosios both supported the Chalcedonian Patriarchs, with Sabas going to Constantinople to meet with the emperor Anastasius.<sup>15</sup> By 518 with the reign of Justin and Justinian, Jerusalem and the Judean Desert received imperial support and seemingly secured the Chalcedonian position in the region. Within Gaza, by the early sixth century the predominately non-Chalcedonian stance of the monks is up for debate as well. The reigns of Justin I (r. 518-527) and Justinian (r. 527-565) brought about another round of forced expulsions of non-Chalcedonian bishops and monks from Syria and Palestine between 525 and 531, which can be seen as a possible explanation for this doctrinal shift.<sup>16</sup>

### *Second Origenist Controversy*

During the mid-sixth century in Palestine disputes arose over certain theological theories which became attached to Origen and thus labelled the second Origenist controversy.<sup>17</sup> The dispute centered on three central issues: the preexistence of the soul, *apocatastasis*, and the form of the body at the resurrection.<sup>18</sup> In general, these issues have been attached not only to Origen, but to Evagrius Ponticus and Didymus the Blind as well. Some scholars have suggested that the

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<sup>15</sup> These incidents will be discussed below.

<sup>16</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *Monastic School of Gaza*, 214.

<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that none of the examined sources in either the Judean Desert or Gaza agreed with the theological theories associated with Origenism, but instead they all condemned them incorrect. For studies on the second Origenist controversy see Lorenzo Perrone, "Palestinian Monasticism, the Bible, and Theology in the Wake of the Second Origenist Controversy." In *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church* (2001): 245-59; Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*; Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *Monastic School of Gaza*, 101-106; Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism. A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 331-352.

<sup>18</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 102.

ideas emphasized during this second controversy were in fact more connected to Evagrius than Origen himself.<sup>19</sup> However, there has also been work which argues that the ideas that circulated in the sixth century had little to actually do with Evagrius' work, but instead what later interpreters created out of his circulated ideas.<sup>20</sup> In connection with these ideas, it has also been suggested that the group that becomes labeled as "Origenists," were not a tight knit group of individuals that held specific theological beliefs, but instead were labeled as such by their interest in and willingness to speculate on these issues and their interest in theological exploration.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the possible issues with his presentation of the events, Cyril provides the most coherent narrative of the controversy within his *Lives*.<sup>22</sup> The New Laura—a laura initially founded by monks rebelling against Sabas but later brought under his authority—served as the headquarters for the Origenist monks of the Judean Desert. This fact was discovered in 514 when one of Sabas' disciples was elected abbot. At this discovery the four offending monks—Nonnus, Leontius of Byzantium, Domitian, and Theodore Ascidas—were expelled from the monastery

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<sup>19</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 101-102; Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 22-23.

<sup>20</sup> Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus: Beyond Heresy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 46-71.

<sup>21</sup> Brian Daley, *Leontius of Byzantium: The Complete Works*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017), 14-15; Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, 369-70. Hombergen attempted to use this categorization to argue that the Origenists were more interested in and connected with the mystical and interior aspects of asceticism reminiscent of Egypt in the fourth centuries in contrast to a more institutionalized understanding of monasticism which he connects with Cyril. As this dissertation has revealed this is a misconception of monasticism in the Judean Desert and has missed the continued focus on the individual monk within the writings of Cyril. While this understanding of the Origenists is convincing, scholars must be careful to not use this idea to over generalize monastic understandings in the region and erect barriers between the varied communities.

<sup>22</sup> See Hombergen, *Second Origenist Controversy*, for a study of these events and the accuracy of Cyril's claims.

with the support of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Elias (r. 494-516) and went south, most likely to Eleutheropolis or Ascalon.<sup>23</sup> After Agapetus' death the new abbot of the New Laura, Mamas, secretly allowed the Origenists to return to the monastery around 520. At this point Cyril claims that the group decided to remain in secret, awaiting the death of Sabas before promoting their views.<sup>24</sup> After the death of Sabas in 532, the Origenists began to openly promote their views outside of the New Laura, gaining support in the monastery of Martyrius where the aforementioned Domitian had become abbot as well as at the Laura of Firminus.

Concurrently, Cyril reported that the Origenist party gained support and influence in Constantinople where they strengthened the Chalcedonian party.<sup>25</sup> This culminated with Domitian being appointed of Ancyra in Galatia and Theodore Ascidas as bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. Cyril states that this resulted in an increase in the power of the Origenist party and their spread throughout Palestine. Back in the Judean Desert, after several failed attempts at getting an Origenist elected as abbot of the Great Laura, they finally succeeded in 546 with the election of the Origenist monk George. In response to this, John the Hesychast and other monastic elders of the Great Laura left the monastery.<sup>26</sup> However, George only served as abbot for seven months before he was—interestingly—deposed by the Origenist party on charges of debauchery.<sup>27</sup> In his place a 'orthodox' monk, Cassianus of Scythopolis, was elected abbot and

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<sup>23</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas*, in *Kyrrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 124.20-125.15; See Patrich, *Sabas*, 331-52 for a detailed recounting of these events.

<sup>24</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 125.20-25.

<sup>25</sup> Patrich, *Sabas*, 334.

<sup>26</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 195.20-195.25. See below for a discussion of this incident.

<sup>27</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 196.5. Patrich, *Sabas*, 339.

served for ten months before dying. Conon was then elected abbot in 548. About the same time in 547, Nonnus, the individual Cyril identified as the leader of the Origenist party of Palestine, died after which a split amongst the group developed. During these internal strifes, Conan and a group of Palestinian monks went to Constantinople and were able to meet with Justinian around 552 and provide him with a document listing the heretical elements of the Origenists' theology. This document was used during the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 and guided the condemnation of Origen and his followers.

### **Doctrinal Loyalty**

Prior to delving into the commonalities which existed between the Judean Desert and Gaza it is necessary to identify the variances which did exist, namely over the emphasized importance of doctrinal loyalty as mentioned in the introduction.

#### *Moschos and Orthodoxy*

In contrast to the other examined sources, Moschos not only emphasizes the importance of loyalty to Chalcedonian orthodoxy, but also its acceptance as an essential element of the monastic life.<sup>28</sup> Focusing on an ascetic existence was not enough to ensure salvation in multiple tales of the *Meadow*. This fact is most clearly stated in a tale about Cyriacos, a monk at the Laura of Calamon, and his interaction with a Nestorian monk. The Nestorian, Theophanes, came to ask Cyriacos about “lewd thoughts”.<sup>29</sup> After Cyriacos lectured him over the importance of self-control and purity, Theophanes announced that he was in communion with the Nestorians and

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<sup>28</sup> Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 90.

<sup>29</sup> John Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, In *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Graeca, Vol. 87:3, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1865), Ch 26. Τοῦτ' ἂν παρέβαλεν ἀδελφὸς ξενικὸς, ἐκ τῆς χώρας τοῦ Δαρᾶς, ὀνόματι Θεοφάνης, ἐρωτῆσαι τὸν γέροντα περὶ λογισμοῦ πορνείας.

because of this could not stay with the elder.<sup>30</sup> At this revelation Cyriacos became concerned and urged Theophanes to come to the “catholic and apostolic church.”<sup>31</sup> When Theophanes would not immediately relent, Cyriacos encouraged him to remain in his cell and pray for God to reveal the truth. During his second day of prayer an angel appeared before Theophanes and showed him a “dark and foul place” in which Nestorius, Theodore, Eutyches, Apollinarios, Evagrius, Didymus, Dioscorus, Severus, Arius, and Origen all lived in fire.<sup>32</sup> The angel stated that his place was prepared for everyone who followed the teachings of these individuals no matter their lifestyle, for “if a man practices all virtues, but does not glorify [God] properly, into this place he will come.”<sup>33</sup>

Abba Theodoulos, whom Moschos had met with at the Church of Saint Sophia in Alexandria, related that he had once met a Syrian monk at a nearby hostel who seemed to be living an austere ascetic life. The monk only possessed a hair shirt, cloak, and some bread. He spent all his time standing in the corner reciting verses and talking to no one.<sup>34</sup> After Theodoulos spoke with this monk, however, he learned that he was actually a Severan, which caused a spiritual crisis for Theodoulos due to the Syrian’s “noble conduct and virtuous lifestyle.”<sup>35</sup> After three days of prostration and prayer on the issue Theodoulos was granted a miracle, in the form

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<sup>30</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 26 ἐγὼ εἰς τὴν χώραν μου τοῖς Νεστοριανοῖς κοινωνῶ.

<sup>31</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 26 καὶ προσελθεῖν τῇ ἀγίᾳ καθολικῇ καὶ ἀποστολικῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ.

<sup>32</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 26 Καὶ παραλαβὼν αὐτὸν ἀποφέρει εἰς τόπον σκοτεινὸν καὶ δυσώδη μετὰ πυρὸς, καὶ δείκνυσιν αὐτῷ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ πυρὶ Νεστόριον· καὶ Θεόδωρον, Εὐτυχέα καὶ Ἀπολινάριον, Εὐάγριον καὶ Δίδυμον, Διόσκορον καὶ Σευήρον, Ἄρειον, καὶ Ὠριγένην, καὶ ἄλλους τινάς.

<sup>33</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 26 Λέγω γάρ σοι, ὅτι ἐὰν πάσας τὰς ἀρετὰς ποιήσῃ ἄνθρωπος, καὶ μὴ ὀρθῶς δοξάζῃ, εἰς τὸν τόπον τοῦτον ἔρχεται.

<sup>34</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 106.

<sup>35</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 106. τὴν καλλίστην αὐτοῦ πολιτείαν καὶ τὸν ἐνάρετον βίον.

of a dove blackened with soot above the Syrian's head, which reaffirmed his own theological stance as orthodox and the Syrian monk as a heretic.<sup>36</sup>

In a final tale, a monk described as a “hard worker, but simple concerning faith,” would receive communion in whichever church he happened to be in.<sup>37</sup> Because of this an angel appeared to him and asked if he wanted to be buried in the way of the Egyptian monks or in the custom of Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup> The simple monk told another monk about the encounter and asked for advice. After learning that the simple monk would receive communion from any church, the colleague urged him to only accept communion from the “holy catholic and apostolic Church” which accepted the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon and told him that he must answer that he wanted to be buried in the custom of Jerusalem. The angel then returned to the simple monk at which point he responded that he wanted to be buried after Jerusalem at which point the monk died. The tale ends with the comment that this event occurred “so that the elder would not lose his labors and pronounced a heretic.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mochos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 106.

<sup>37</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 178 ὅτι εἰς τὰ Μονίδια γέρων μέγας πονικὸς ἐκαθέζετο, ἦν δὲ ἀφελὴς περὶ τὴν πίστιν.

<sup>38</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 178. This is possibly connected to a system attributed to Anthony and Marcarius and reported in Palladius' *Lausiac History* 21.8-9. When monks came to see Anthony, Marcarius would first meet with them and judge their character. Anthony would then ask Macarius if the visiting monks were from Egypt or Jerusalem. Responding that they were from Egypt meant that the monk was careless at which point Anthony would provide them with a meal and a prayer and then ask them to leave. If Marcarius responded that they were from Jerusalem, it meant the monk was serious and studious to which Anthony would stay and talk with them. Barsanuphius used the analogy as well. See Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 42. It is interesting that the phrase is now used to distinguish between good and bad monks based on their theological stance rather than their adherence to an ascetic existence.

<sup>39</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, 178. Τοῦτο δὲ ὅλον γέγονεν, ἵνα μὴ τοὺς κόπους αὐτοῦ ἀπολέσῃ ὁ γέρων, καὶ μετὰ αἰρετικῶν κατακριθῇ.



In each of these tales, it was not enough for monks to maintain the proper ascetic praxis. In order to receive the reward of heaven they must also adhere to Chalcedonian doctrines. For Moschos, acceptance of the proper doctrinal definitions was a required element of the monastic life. As will be detailed below, this is a unique voice among the examined sources of Palestinian monasticism in the sixth century.

### *Cyril of Scythopolis*

Throughout his *Lives*, Cyril strove to present Euthymios and Sabas as stalwart defenders of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. Within Cyril's narrative, it was through the direct actions of these figures that the 'proper' faith was promulgated throughout Palestine. From the very beginning, Cyril presented Euthymios as an adherent to Chalcedon. Two of Euthymios' disciples who had become bishops—Stephen bishop of Jamnia and John bishop of the Saracens—were present at the council and Cyril reports that they immediately brought the new definition to Euthymios for approval.<sup>40</sup> After reading it, Euthymios, "as a true examiner of correct thought," agreed with Chalcedon's profession of faith.<sup>41</sup> Cyril also had Euthymios give a speech to the two archimandrites that the non-Chalcedonian Patriarch Theodosios sent to him while they controlled Jerusalem in 452-53. Instead of joining the non-Chalcedonian party Euthymios stated that Chalcedon was in agreement with the councils of Nicaea and Ephesus while also conforming to the theology of Cyril of Alexandria, confirming the legitimacy of the new definition.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, in *Kyrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der alchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 41.5-41.20. Honigmann includes both of the bishops on his list of Chalcedon signatories. See Honigmann, "The Original Lists of the Members of the Council of Nicaea, the Robber Synod and the Council of Chalcedon," *Byzantion* 14 (1942) P. 50-62.

<sup>41</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 41.19 ὡς ἀληθῶς ὀρθῆς διανοίας ἐξεταστής.

<sup>42</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 42.10-44.5.

It was through the direct actions of Euthymios that Eudocia shifted to the Chalcedonian camp after initially rebelling against it.<sup>43</sup> According to Cyril, Eudocia received letters from family members urging her to agree with Chalcedon. This, along with the death of her son-in-law and the enslavement of her daughter and grandchildren in Rome caused her to doubt her theological stance. Eudocia decided to write to Symeon the Stylite seeking his advice to which he responded advising her to seek out and follow the guidance of Euthymios.<sup>44</sup> After being persuaded to visit her, Euthymios urged her to accept Chalcedon along with the other ecumenical councils, to leave the company of Dioscorus and enter into communion with Bishop Juvenal of Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> Eudocia accepted his council, went to Jerusalem, reconciled with Juvenal, and accepted Chalcedon. Cyril depicted Euthymios as a leading proponent of Chalcedon.

Sabas is presented as continuing and expanding the mantle of defender of orthodoxy throughout his life. In comparison to Euthymios, Cyril placed Sabas on a grander scale, interacting with and influencing emperors in an official capacity. During his first trip to Constantinople around 511, Cyril states that Sabas met with the emperor Anastasius (R. 491-518) several times. During their second meeting, Anastasius made a speech connecting Elias, the Patriarch of Jerusalem at the time, with Nestorius because of his acceptance of Chalcedon.<sup>46</sup> Cyril had Sabas defend Elias, and Chalcedon, by stating that because he had been properly educated in the doctrines by “the ancient luminaries and miracle-working fathers of our desert,”

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<sup>43</sup> Eudocia, wife of the emperor Theodosios II (405-50). She permanently settled in Jerusalem around 444.

<sup>44</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 47.10-48.5.

<sup>45</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 48.25-49 .

<sup>46</sup> Cyril. *Life of Sabas*, 143.16-144.10.

Elias rejected Nestorius' division and Eutyches' confusion.<sup>47</sup> In addition, Sabas stated that Elias followed the doctrines of Cyril of Alexandria and anathematized those who did not.

In 513, Cyril again placed Sabas at the center of the doctrinal disputes. After Severus became Patriarch of Antioch, he twice sent his synodical letters to Elias in Jerusalem. On the first attempt Elias refused to acknowledge him. On the second, aided by the emperor Anastasius, Severus again sent his letters accompanied by clerics and an imperial force.<sup>48</sup> Learning of this, Sabas, with other abbots (ἡγούμενοι) of the desert, went up to Jerusalem and drove the individuals carrying Severus' letters from the city and then rallied the monks to gather in front of the Church of Calvary and shout "anathema to Severus and those in communion with him."<sup>49</sup> According to Cyril, in response to this Anastasius sent the *dux* of Palestine, Olympus of Caesarea, to Jerusalem and removed Elias from his see and exiled him to Aila near the Red Sea.<sup>50</sup> In his place, John was made patriarch in 516 after promising to accept Severus and condemn Chalcedon. However, Sabas and the other fathers of the desert came to him and urged him to support Chalcedon which he agreed to. The *dux*—now Anastasius son of Pamphilus—returned to Jerusalem and imprisoned John over this issue, until the patriarch agreed to publicly announce his acceptance of Severus. However, in a rather picturesque scene John ascended before the crowd in the Church of the protomartyr Stephen flanked by Sabas and Theodosios as

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<sup>47</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 144.10-15. τῶν ἀρχαίων φωστήρων καὶ σημειοφόρων πατέρων τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐρήμου.

<sup>48</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 148.20-149.

<sup>49</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas* 149-149.5. ἀνάθεμα Σευήρῳ καὶ τοῖς κοινωνοῦσιν αὐτῷ.

<sup>50</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 150.5-150.10.

archimandrites and together anathematized Nestorius, Eutyches, Severus, Soterichus of Caesarea in Cappadocia, and everyone who did not accept the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>51</sup>

In 518 Sabas was selected by John to be a member of a group that traveled to Caesarea and Scythopolis to publish Justin's letter recalling all those exiled by Anastasius as well as adding the Council of Chalcedon to the diptychs.<sup>52</sup> During his second visit to Constantinople in 530 Sabas met with Justinian and prophesized that God would return Africa, Rome, and all the rest of the empire of Honorius to Justinian in order that he root out the heresies of Arius, Nestorius, and Origen.<sup>53</sup> Cyril goes on to explain that Sabas added Nestorius and Origen in particular because he had discovered that members of his own party had been found siding with Theodore of Mopsuestia and that a certain Leontius of Byzantium had embraced the doctrines of Origen.<sup>54</sup> On learning this Sabas had expelled them from his company.

In contrast to the lives of Euthymios and Sabas, Cyril only briefly mentions the orthodox stances of his other monastic figures. In addition, Cyril connects them more with the struggle over Origenism that arose in the Palestine than Chalcedon as we saw with Euthymios and Sabas. The sole incident in the *Life* of John the Hesychast involved his ability to identify an "Apochist" with his gift of discernment.<sup>55</sup> A deaconess of the Church of Constantinople named Basilina

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<sup>51</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 151.15-152. ἀμελλητὶ οὖν οἱ τρεῖς ἐκ συμφώνου ἀνα- θεματίζουσιν Νεστόριον καὶ Εὐτυχέα καὶ Σευήρον καὶ Σωτήριχον τὸν Καισαρείας Καππαδοκίας καὶ πάντα τὸν μὴ δεχόμενον τὴν σύνοδον Χαλκηδόνης.

<sup>52</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 162.20-162.25.

<sup>53</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 175.20-176.

<sup>54</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 176.10. On Leontius See Daley, "The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium"; Daley, *Leontius of Byzantium: The Complete Works*.

<sup>55</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 218.19-219.19. The name means schismatic or those cut off from. It is the name Cyril commonly used to refer to non-Chalcedonians. See Wortley trans. *Lives*, 89, n70.

came to Jerusalem and brought her nephew who was a follower of Severus of Antioch. In an attempt to bring him back into communion with the Chalcedonian church, she begged Theodore, a disciple of John the Hesychast, to take her nephew to the holy man. Theodore consented and when they presented themselves before John's door, he recognized the nephew's alignment with Severus and refused to bless him. This miraculous recognition convinced the nephew of the legitimacy of the Chalcedonians and immediately came into communion with them. Cyril seeming to recognize the lack of discussion of John's defense of 'orthodoxy' in his *Life* mentions in his conclusion that he only provided a select number of instances, omitting to recount the combats on behalf of the faith which John displayed against the doctrines of Origen and Theodore of Mopseustia.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, Cyril only mentions a single incident of Cyriacus acting as promoter of orthodoxy. Cyril recounts that while visiting John the Hesychast at the Great Laura, the elder asked him to deliver letters to Cyriacus, who at the time was living in the hanging cave of Chariton at Souka. The letters, according to Cyril, asked Cyriacus to help "put down the raging at the New Laura with Nonnus and Leontius fighting against Christ by means of the doctrines of Origen."<sup>57</sup> After delivering the letters, Cyril asked Cyriacus about the views of the Origenists, in particular the ideas of the preexistence of the souls, *apocatastasis*, and a non-bodily

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<sup>56</sup> Cyril, *Life of John*, 221.20. This will be discussed below in Chapter Four.

<sup>57</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, in *Kyrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 229.10-229.15. καὶ δυσωπούντων αὐτὸν νῦν ἀγωνίσασθαι ἐν ταῖς πρὸς θεὸν πρεσβείαις πρὸς τὸ ἐν τάχει καταβληθῆναι τὸ φρύαγμα τῶν ἐν τῇ Νέαι λαύραι μετὰ Νόννου καὶ Λεοντίου κατὰ Χριστοῦ στρατευομένων διὰ τῶν Ὠριγένους δογμάτων.

resurrection.<sup>58</sup> Cyril then had Cyriacus delve into a substantial speech on the errors of these views and a brief history of Nonnus and Leontius.<sup>59</sup>

In each of his lives Cyril positioned his monastic fathers as promoters of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. In the face of the disputes over the council of Chalcedon and Origenism Cyril has his subjects ensure that proper doctrines were promulgated throughout Palestine.

### *Barsanuphius and John*

While within the *Correspondence* there is a sense of right and wrong belief, Barsanuphius and John are incredibly vague on where the division between orthodox and heretical lie. As will be discussed in detail below, the Old Men of Gaza are adamant that concerns over doctrinal debates were a distraction, if not a hinderance, to the monastic life. However, when pressed, Barsanuphius and John do indicate that there was right and wrong belief. John vaguely states that God requires monks to “believe correctly” (πιστεύειν ὀρθῶς) that which they had received from the holy church when they were baptized and to keep the commandments. In a separate letter, John provides a slightly more detailed statement of faith, but still with a large amount of room for interpretation. In a series of letters concerning anathematizing heretics, John was asked what an individual should do if they were not sure if someone was actually a heretic but were being asked to anathematize them. John’s response was to state that anathematizing someone you did not know resembled condemnation, and in its place the monk should simply state that “other than the faith of the holy 318 Fathers, I know no other

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<sup>58</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 229.25-230.10. These are generally the three ideas which were most commonly attached to “Origenism.”

<sup>59</sup> This speech will be discussed in more depth below.

faith and one who believes contrary to this casts them self under anathema.”<sup>60</sup> In the eyes of Barsanuphius and John, these basic statements of faith were all that would be required for a monk.

What is blatantly missing from the *Correspondence* is any sort of emphasis on, or discussion of, doctrinal loyalty over the Council of Chalcedon. There is no discussion of Chalcedon in both the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John and the *Discourses* of Dorotheos. At no point in the texts do these individuals explicitly state their loyalty to or belief in either Chalcedonian or non-Chalcedonian doctrine. Nor do they state this type of loyalty was important for the monastic life. Given the period and other contemporary Christian sources, this absent is odd. Some historians have interpreted this absence as a sign that the region had shifted to a Chalcedonian stance, generally pointing to Barsanuphius’ letter(s) with Peter, the patriarch of Jerusalem (R. 524-552), as proof.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, some scholars have pointed to the lack of discussion of Chalcedon, but mention of Nicaea, as reasoning for seeing the Old Men of Gaza as crypto non-Chalcedonians, or at least moderates in the doctrinal debates.<sup>62</sup> While there have been several beneficial pieces of scholarship that have explored these various possibilities, the rest of the chapter will be taking a different approach. Rather than squint into the shadows of the *Correspondence* in an attempt to catch glimpses of what the Old Men might have believed, what

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<sup>60</sup> Barsanuphius and John, *Correspondence*, in *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*, ed. F. Neyt and P. de Angelis, 5 Vols. Sources chrétiennes 426, 427, 450, 451, 468 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997-2002), L. 701. πλὴν τῆς πίστεως τῶν ἁγίων τριακοσίων δέκα καὶ ὀκτὼ Πατέρων ἄλλην οὐ γινώσκω καὶ ὁ παρὰ ταύτην φρονῶν ἔρριπεν ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὸ ἀνάθεμα.

<sup>61</sup> see Patrich, *Sabas*, 6; Perrone, “Byzantine Monasticism in Gaza and the Judean Desert”; Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 821.

<sup>62</sup> Mezynski, *The Effects of the Origenist Controversy*,” 1-2; Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, *Monastic School of Gaza*, 218. Hevelone-Harper suggests that the Old Men belonged to a moderate camp in that they disagreed with the Chalcedonian definitions but continued to support Chalcedonian bishops. See Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert*, 28.

follows will focus on what the Old Men do say. That is, the chapter focuses on their explicit statements that theological speculation was not part of, and in fact harmful to, the monastic life and will situate the place of these ideas within sixth-century Palestine.

### **Theology in the Monastic Life**

#### *The Old Men of Gaza & Dorotheos*

While in the mid to late fifth century Gaza served as a base for non-Chalcedonian support, by the sixth century Barsanuphius, John, and Dorotheos are presented as taking a different approach.<sup>63</sup> The Old Men of Gaza and Dorotheos are very clear throughout their works; theologizing had no place in the monastic life and it could be a dangerous distraction from the necessary ascetic practices. It was not something expected of them by God let alone their abbots. The Old Men go so far as to caution monks from “rushing to anathematize anyone at all.”<sup>64</sup> The fear in this, according to John in another letter, was that by judging others, monks would be condemning themselves.<sup>65</sup> The monks should instead maintain the stance that they were more sinful than everyone else and be doing nothing but mourning their own sins.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony, “Gazan Monasticism,” 43.

<sup>64</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 699 σὺ δὲ μὴ τρέχε εἰς ἀναθεματισμὸν τινος ὅλως. This was interestingly in response to someone asking if they should anathematize Nestorius. The response starting by saying Nestorius and his followers are clearly under anathema, but then goes on to urge monks to not hasten to do so against anyone.

<sup>65</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L 700

<sup>66</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 700.



## *Not Anti-Intellectual*

Before delving into the reasons that the Old Men of Gaza and Dorotheos did not view theological debate as essential to the monastic life, it is worth mentioning that this view should not be taken as anti-intellectual.<sup>67</sup> The Old Men and Dorotheos do not tell their monks that they should not read or become educated. In contrast, they continually urge their monks to read and were at the center of an impressive letter writing network designed to educate fellow monks. The point of contention was not learning, but the content which a monk should focus on.

Theologizing did not produce good monks. In addition, as is clear from the letters, Barsanuphius, John, and Dorotheos were all educated and versed in theological rhetoric. With this in mind, the urging of the editor in the prologue to the letter collection to remember the context of each letter is crucial. Theologizing could prove as a deadly distraction from the proper monastic life as envisioned by the Old Men, especially for younger novice monks. In a period seemingly engulfed in debates over Christian theology, the Old Men recognized this fact and thus encouraged their disciples to steer away from such discussion and focus instead on their ascetic practices.

Despite condemning theological speculation over the preexistence of souls and *apokatastasis* in the works of Origen, Didymus the Blind, and Evagrius as “unspiritual and demonic,” John the Prophet does not say that the works of these individuals should not be read.<sup>68</sup> When asked this question specifically about the works of Evagrius, John urges the writing monk to not accept these doctrines, however, he could “read, if you desire, those works that are

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<sup>67</sup> Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, “Territory, Anti-Intellectual Attitude, and Identity Formation in Late Antique Palestinian Monastic Communities.” *Religion & Theology* 17 (3–4) (2010): 258-263.

<sup>68</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 601. ψυχική, δαιμονιώδης.

beneficial to the soul.”<sup>69</sup> More so than Cyril of Scythopolis who outright condemned Evagrius in full, John and Barsanuphius allowed their disciples to read a wide range of authors, as long as they are focusing on the proper topics.

Dorotheos of Gaza adopted and maintained this stance on figures such as Evagrius as well. In his *Discourses*, Dorotheos cites Evagrius by name on eight separate occasions. However, they all derive from his monks that focused on the monastic life, the *Pratikos* or *To monks in monasteries and communities and exhortation to a virgin*, and the information was directly in relation to useful sayings related to asceticism. Despite the heretical label that had been placed upon Evagrius, Dorotheos sees no qualms about continuing to use him as an authoritative figure when it came to asceticism, appearing alongside mentions of Poemen, Macarius, and Arsenius.<sup>70</sup>

Barsanuphius, John the Prophet, and Dorotheos should not be viewed as anti-intellectual due to their disengagement with doctrinal debates. It was not a stance built on hostility towards knowledge or education. The extensive letter writing network at the center of which they sat and the continual references to scripture and monastic literature stands as an immovable counterpoint. Their form of monasticism encouraged the attainment of knowledge and the seeking of answers from authoritative sources. However, that knowledge needed to be in relation to the ascetic life. Theology was not in the intellectual realm of the humble monk and it should not be the focus of their lives. As we will see, it was understood as a source of danger and possible spiritual harm which monks should avoid.

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<sup>69</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 602. ἀναγίνωσκε δὲ αὐτοῦ, εἰ θέλεις, τὰ πρὸς ὠφέλειαν ψυχῆς.

<sup>70</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Letters*, In *Dorothee de Gaza: Œuvres spirituelles*, edited and translated by Lucien Regnault and J. de Préville, *Sources Chrétiennes* 92 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1963), 5.63 for Pomen; 5.65 for Macarius; 10.104 for Arsenius.

Letters 600 to 607 are the most direct discussion of theology and its place in the monastic life within the letters of Barsanuphius and John. They are composed of a discussion with a monk who wrote to the Old Men about the doctrines found in the works of Origen and Didymus, as well as the *Gnostic Chapters* of Evagrius and his disciples.<sup>71</sup> In particular, the monk is concerned about the notions of the pre-existence of the souls and *apokatastasis*.<sup>72</sup> He writes that he does not know if these doctrines should be believed, especially since “nothing is said about these things in sacred scripture.”<sup>73</sup> In addition to asking if these doctrines should be believed, the monk finished his letter by asking how these individuals could write such doctrine when it had not been passed down by the apostles or explained by the Holy Spirit.

Barsanuphius’ initial response to the letter was one of grave concern for the monk: “I have given up my own mourning, and I mourn over your fall; I have stopped weeping over my sins, and I weep for you as if for my own child.”<sup>74</sup> This concern, as Barsanuphius goes on to explain, was over the monk’s preoccupation with theologizing altogether; his—and the human

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<sup>71</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 600. Οὐκ οἶδα Πάτερ πῶς ἐνέπεσα εἰς τὰ βιβλία Ὁριγένους καὶ Διδύμου, καὶ εἰς τὰ Γνωστικά Εὐαγρίου καὶ εἰς τὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ. John is the respondent in letters 601 and 602, with Barsanuphius responding to the rest.

<sup>72</sup> The pre-existence of souls refers to the concept that all souls existed before the creation as naked intellects. They subsequently turned away from the light of God. The souls that turned furthest away became demons, while those that preserved their original condition became angels. The flesh of humanity was a punishment for those souls that turned away. *Apokatastasis* is the “restoration” of all things. Eventually hell will come to an end with the conclusion that all beings, with the possible inclusion of the devil, will return to God.

<sup>73</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 600. Καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲν τούτων εἴρηται ἐν τῇ θεῇ Γραφῇ. Despite writing this, in the next paragraph the monk cites Mt 25:46 and Mk 9:48 as proof that the notion of *apokatastasis* is false.

<sup>74</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 600. ἀφῆκά μου τὸ πένθος καὶ πενθῶ σε ποῦ ἐνέπεσας, καὶ τὸν κλαυθμὸν τὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν μου καὶ κλαίω σε ὡς ἴδιον τέκνον.

race as a whole—desire to “investigate the incomprehensible.”<sup>75</sup> Such thoughts were doctrines of the Greeks and vain talk of idle people. Barsanuphius urged the monk to “not dwell on them, do not study them; for they are full of bitterness and produce fruit on to death.”<sup>76</sup> It was not the monk or Barsanuphius’ place, to contemplate these matters.<sup>77</sup> Instead, the Old Man suggested the monk needed to work on attaining humility and obedience along with the other virtues emphasized by the desert fathers.<sup>78</sup> Monks should be considering and mourning their own passions not doctrinal dilemmas.<sup>79</sup> Barsanuphius leaves no doubt in the mind of the reader, theologizing was not part of the proper monastic life.<sup>80</sup> It was not a beneficial topic for monks to dwell on.

In a later letter, an individual asked if they should participate in discussions of faith when in the company of other fathers, as the letter writer felt that keeping silent would be a betrayal of their faith. The response—the editor does not mention which Old Man it was—was a direct command: “never quarrel about faith.”<sup>81</sup> The reason was twofold. First, talking about doctrine was not required because it was “beyond” (ὕπερβαίνει) the writer.<sup>82</sup> Second, these types of

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<sup>75</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 600. πῶς ἐξιχνιάσαι θέλουσι τὰ ἀκατάληπτα.

<sup>76</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 600 Μὴ στῆς ἐν αὐτοῖς, μὴ μελετήσης αὐτά, πικρίας γέμουσι καὶ τελεσφοροῦσι καρπὸν εἰς θάνατον. Later in the same letter Barsanuphius likens the study of these doctrines to a pit of the devil in which the monk had fallen.

<sup>77</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 603.

<sup>78</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 600. Barsanuphius repeats this sentiment in letters 603 and 604.

<sup>79</sup> This sentiment is repeated in Barsanuphius, L. 699 as well.

<sup>80</sup> Daley, *Leontius of Byzantium*, 14-15.

<sup>81</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 694. Μηδέποτε ἀμφιβάλλης περὶ πίστεως.

<sup>82</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 694. Καὶ τὸ λαλεῖν δὲ περὶ δογμάτων οὐ χρή, ὕπερβαίνει γάρ σε ταῦτα.

discussions were not demanded by God. Instead God only required someone to “believe correctly” (πιστεύειν ὀρθῶς) that which they had received from the holy church when they were baptized and to keep the commandments.<sup>83</sup> This stance was present in the letters on Origenism as well. In letter 604 Barsanuphius tells the monk that while on the day of judgment he will be asked to account for all his passions, he will not be asked about doctrinal matters. Nor will the monk be punished for not knowing or understanding doctrine.<sup>84</sup> Again, the same point is made. Instead of focusing on doctrinal debates monks should instead pray to God concerning their sins and spend their time contemplating their passions and the attainment of the virtues.<sup>85</sup>

In a possible continuation of the conversation from letter 694, in letter 695 the writer asks the Old Men if they happen to witness a discussion between a heretic and a member of the orthodox faith and the orthodox individual is losing, would it be acceptable to intervene.<sup>86</sup> The Old Men responded that the writer should not. By speaking publicly, an individual is presenting themselves as a teacher. However, if that individual does not actually have the authority to do so, then their words will not be assured by God.<sup>87</sup> Because of this, it would be far better for the individual to instead pray to God over the issue, whom will deal with the individuals debating as needed while the writer remains humble.

As a final instance of this stance on theologizing, a monk named Theodore sent a letter to Barsanuphius asking, on the behalf of several monks, who was it that gave the devil his power

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<sup>83</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L 694.

<sup>84</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.604. Mezynski, “Effects of the Origenist Controversy,” 157.

<sup>85</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 604.

<sup>86</sup> As with letter 694, the editor of the letters does not mention who the writer was or if this was the same individual. Nor do they mention which Old Man responded.

<sup>87</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 695. πληροφορητικὸς ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ οὐ γίνεται .

and authority. The Great Old Man begin his response by telling the monks that this is not necessary for them to understand.<sup>88</sup> The intricacies and speculation of the question were not what monks should be focused on. It was a distraction from the proper ascetic path to perfection, which Barsanuphius makes abundantly clear in the closing of the letter. After explaining to the monks why God should not be considered as being responsible for evil, out of fear that the monks would come to this conclusion out of ignorance, Barsanuphius concludes his letter by apologizing for taking the time to explain this as they were “childish questions” which has just served as a distraction from the monastic life.<sup>89</sup>

Not only was theologizing a distraction from the attainment of virtues, but it could also cause harm by leading monks to succumb to the passion of pride. A monk wrote to Barsanuphius saying that on occasion he would read a book on dogmatic issues and felt that doing so helped to transfer his intellect from passionate thoughts to contemplating the doctrinal debate. However, he was not sure if this was proper. Barsanuphius urged the monk to not meditate on these issues as they transferred the monk’s intellect upward. The monk should instead meditate on the words of the desert fathers as these instead humbled a monk’s intellect. Theologizing was *τροφή*, sensual nourishment, in contrast to meditation on the saying of the fathers which was *τροφή*, spiritual nourishment.<sup>90</sup> In contrast to the fathers who focused on humbling themselves, focusing on doctrine led monks to puffing themselves up by relying on their own authority and considering themselves knowledgeable enough to pose answers to the mysterious of God.<sup>91</sup> According to

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<sup>88</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 127.

<sup>89</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 127, ζητημάτων παιδικῶν.

<sup>90</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 547.

<sup>91</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 604.

Barsanuphius, even the saints were not able fully to comprehend the depths of God.<sup>92</sup> While reading on the dogmatic issues distracted monk from one their passions, they were in the process indulging in another.

In addition to the dangers that theological speculation posed to a monk, the process of theologizing also went against the monastic emphasis on silence. John of Beersheba wrote to Barsanuphius asking if he had acted well by having a long conversation with another monk. Barsanuphius responded that silence is always more wonderful and glorious, especially when John found himself almost theologizing.<sup>93</sup> John later repeated this sentiment in another letter, adding that the fathers loved and honored silence and citing Job and Genesis as scriptural evidence.<sup>94</sup> John goes on to say, however, that complete silence is only achievable by the perfect. When everyone else, out of weakness, felt the need to talk they should do so only about those things which contributed to the edification of the soul.<sup>95</sup> Even when speaking on the proper topics, John warns to keep discussion brief, citing Proverbs: “when there are many words, transgression is unavoidable.”<sup>96</sup> Even if the words are beneficial, if a monk thinks they are helping others by repeating them, then they are condemning themselves as they are not practicing what they are telling others.

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<sup>92</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 604.

<sup>93</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 36. μάθε ὅτι ἡ σιωπὴ θαυμαστοτέρα καὶ ἐνδοξοτέρα ἐστὶν αὐτῆς.

<sup>94</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 469. Jb 40.4; Gn 18.27 and 32. See also Barsan L. 697 and 698,

<sup>95</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 469.

<sup>96</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L 469. Prv 10.19.

The proper topic then, according to John, was the *Saying of the Fathers*. Even discussion of scripture should be avoided by monks in this situation as it was a risk to their souls.<sup>97</sup> The risk, according to John, was the possibility that those talking would not properly understand the scriptural words and their spiritual truths. Theologizing would fall into the same category, John and Barsanuphius saw such actions as potentially dangerous.

Along with avoiding theologizing themselves, monks should also avoid interrogating and condemning others over doctrine. John, backed by the wisdom of the fathers, stated that monks only needed a verbal confession from individuals to believe that they were of the correct faith. Monks did not need to interrogate, or doubt, individuals accused of heresy, but only when they were found to be blaspheming Christ and living apart from him should they be avoided.<sup>98</sup> John confirms this view when asked if a monk should abandon their spiritual father if he proclaimed heretical views. If one's abba was accurately found to hold heretical views, then they should leave them. However, if there is only suspicion then a disciple should not abandon or even examine what they believe.<sup>99</sup> The monk should trust in God to reveal what is hidden within people rather than attempt to do so themselves and in the process put themselves in danger.

Dorotheos delves into this concept in his discourse *On Refusal to Judge our Neighbor*. According to Dorotheos, suspicion against one's neighbor, while on the surface an insignificant act, was a dangerous precipice that monks should actively avoid. By focusing on the possible sins of a neighbor, the monk was neglecting their own sins, which in turn caused the monk to

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<sup>97</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 469. Ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ ἡμεῖς διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν ἀσθένειαν οὐκ ἐφθάσαμεν εἰς τὴν τῶν τελείων βαδίζειν ὁδόν, λαλήσωμεν τὰ συντείνοντα πρὸς οἰκοδομήν, ἀπὸ τῶν ῥημάτων τῶν Πατέρων, καὶ μὴ βάλωμεν ἑαυτοὺς εἰς διηγήματα Γραφῶν.

<sup>98</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 536.

<sup>99</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 537



become overwhelmed with the same sins they despised in their neighbor.<sup>100</sup> Building Luke 6:42, Dorotheos urges his monastic audience to work on and ask forgiveness for their own spiritual debt and sins rather than obsessing over those of a neighbor.<sup>101</sup> In addition to a monk's need to focus on their own sins, Dorotheos also mentions that only God has the proper ability to judge and condemn. God alone has the ability to view all aspects of an individual's heart. Monks should instead focus on themselves and strive to work on their own sins and internal thoughts. Focusing on the possibility of sin and heresy in others did not help a monk but instead could only hurt them.

Finally, Dorotheos extols the importance of gaining "true love," as Euthymios had in his death bed speech. Even if the sins of a neighbor are witnessed a monk should not condemn and hate them for it, but instead admonish and seek to help them. The saints, Dorotheos says, certainly saw the sins in everyone they met with, but did not hate the people for it. This sentiment reappears in letters of Barsanuphius and John as well. Despite their stance against theologizing, the Old Men also urged their monks to not condemn others who take part in those debates, as they would not have the knowledge to know if they are speaking correctly or how God will judge the matter.<sup>102</sup> It is at this point that we return to the example with which the section began, that monks should not seek out individuals to anathematize.<sup>103</sup> The path to

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<sup>100</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 6.69.

<sup>101</sup> Luke, 6:42 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye."

<sup>102</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 694.

<sup>103</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 699.

perfection was one of humility; the monk should be focused on their own sins rather than identifying and condemning others.

### *Cyril of Scythopolis*

Cyril's construction of Cyriacus' speech on Origenism featured a similar stance on the place of theologizing, despite Cyril's presentation of his subjects as champions of orthodoxy. In the speech Cyriacus places the theologizing of the Origenists in direct opposition to the ascetic life. According to Cyriacus, instead of reviving the doctrines of Pythagoras, Platos, Origen, Evagrius, and Didymus the Origenists should have "praised and glorified brotherly love, hospitality, virginity, care of the poor, psalmody, all-night vigils, and tears of compunction? Should not they rather be disciplining the body with fasts, traveling to God through prayer, and making this life a rehearsal for death?"<sup>104</sup> As Barsanuphius remarked in his own response, Cyriacus saw the Origenists as obsessed with the doctrines of the "Greeks." Through their pride and their assumption of wisdom the Origenists, according to Cyril and Cyriacus, had become fools in the eyes of God.<sup>105</sup> While not as prevalent in his lives as in the letters of the Old Men, Cyril articulates in Cyriacus' speech the same stance on the place of theologizing in the monastic life. Namely that it was not part of it.

Although Cyril strove throughout his lives to present the Judean Desert fathers as champions of orthodoxy, he always presents doctrinal debate as an exterior rather than internal element of the monastic life. That is to say, Cyril never presents orthodox belief as an element of

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<sup>104</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 230.10-230.20. ἐπαινεῖν καὶ δοξάζειν φιλα- δελφίαν φιλοξενίαν παρθενίαν πτωχοτροφίαν ψαλμωϊδίαν τε καὶ πάννυχον στάσιν καὶ δάκρυα κατανύξεως; οὐκ ἔχρην αὐτοὺς μᾶλλον ὑποπιέζειν νηστείας τὸ σῶμα καὶ δι' εὐχῆς πρὸς θεὸν ἐκδημεῖν καὶ μελέτην θανάτου τὸν βίον ποιεῖσθαι.

<sup>105</sup> Rom 1.21-22. Brian Daley suggests that the 'Origenists' mentioned by Cyril were grouped not by their specific adherence to the doctrines of Origen or Evagrius, but by their willingness to speculate on elements of doctrine. See Daley, *Leontius of Byzantium*, 14-15.

the asceticism of his subjects. This fact is readily apparent in Cyril's recounting of Euthymios' speech before his death. Having foreseen the time of his own death, Euthymios had all his disciples brought to him and gave them a final speech. Euthymios urged his disciples to aim for pure love (εἰλικρινῇ ἀγάπην) which he described as the "the bond of perfection."<sup>106</sup> Euthymios continued to exhort the importance of love, placing it above humility, and finished by urging his disciples to "offer up to him [God] with full willingness purity of soul, chastity of the body, and pure love."<sup>107</sup> What is missing from the speech is any mention of orthodoxy or the importance of proper doctrine. In what is presented as Euthymios' last interaction with his community, he focused on their spiritual welfare for which correct doctrine was not included. After the community selected his successor, Cyril states that Euthymios commanded that his laura be converted into a coenobium. One last time filling his administrative role, Euthymios told his successor where he should build the monastery, how guests should be received, how the psalmody should be performed, and urged him to not neglect monks in distress.<sup>108</sup> Again, Euthymios made no mention of proper doctrine or the importance of Chalcedon. In his last actions in his roles as the spiritual and administrative authority of his community, Euthymios is not presented as interested in placing orthodox belief at the center of the ascetic life of his community.

In several incidents, the actions of Cyril's subjects appear at odds with his description of them as champions of orthodoxy. Rather than stand in the face of opposition many monks chose

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<sup>106</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 58-58.6. ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος πάσης ἀγαθοεργίας τὴν εἰλικρινῇ ἀγάπην διὰ παντὸς κτήσασθε σύνδεσμον οὗσαν τῆς τελειότητος. Col 3:14.

<sup>107</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 58.19 ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος πάσης ἀγαθοεργίας τὴν εἰλικρινῇ ἀγάπην διὰ παντὸς κτήσασθε σύνδεσμον οὗσαν τῆς τελειότητος.

<sup>108</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius* 59-59.5.

self-imposed exile. To return to Cyril's narrative surrounding Euthymios and Chalcedon, despite his contention that Euthymios stood as a champion of orthodoxy in the face of the non-Chalcedonian monastic uprising of Palestine, rather than remain at his laura and fight for the Chalcedonian cause Euthymios instead chose a self-imposed exile to the *paneremos* of Rouba for two years in the face of theological opposition.<sup>109</sup> The direct motive Cyril gave for Euthymios' departure was Theodosios'<sup>110</sup> utter shamelessness brought about by the continual stream of individuals he sent with enticements to Euthymios in an attempt to win him over to the non-Chalcedonian side.<sup>111</sup> This is presented as a disruption of the ascetic life of *hesychia* that Euthymios practiced, so he left his own laura for the solitude of the desert until Theodosios was removed from office. Cyril in fact stated that Euthymios' choice served as an example for the few other Chalcedonian anchorites, including Gerasimos<sup>112</sup>, who left their monasteries and cells while the theological conflict was at its height. Maintenance of the proper lifestyle is what mattered first and foremost. Defense of Chalcedonian orthodoxy could only be undertaken when it was not negatively impacting the individual asceticism of the involved figures.

John the Hesychast also chose to temporarily leave his monastery in the face of theological opposition. Cyril says that in 547 the 'Origenist' party managed to get a monk named

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<sup>109</sup> For Euthymios as a champion of orthodoxy see Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 33, 39.20-41.4, 41.15-19, 42.15-44.4.

<sup>110</sup> The leading non-Chalcedonian monk in Palestine who held the Patriarchate of Jerusalem for twenty months until he was forcibly removed by imperial troops in 453 and Juvenal was reinstated. John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-631* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 5.

<sup>111</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 44.15-18.

<sup>112</sup> Gerasimos was another of the founding figures of the Judean Desert. He established a combined monastery (a coenobium surrounded by a laura) along the Jordan around 455. He died in 475. See Patrich, *Sabas*, 8-9, 205-206.

George elected as abbot of the Great Laura. In response to this, John left the cell he had been living in as a hesychast for some thirty-eight years and withdrew to the Mount of Olives along with “all the pupils of piety, many who were scattered throughout the country side.”<sup>113</sup> It was only after George had been disposed and the ‘orthodox’ monks had regained control of the Great Laura that John returned. While Cyril praised Chalcedonian loyalty, theological confrontation and defense were not essential or a core element of monasticism in the Judean Desert. Doctrinal identity did not overshadow the ascetic life, it was not to come first.

This fact can be seen outside of Cyril’s core figures as well. The arrival of future patriarchs of Jerusalem Martyrius and Elias from Egypt to Palestine in particular brings up an interesting example. The two monks were living as anchorites at Nitria when Timothy Aelurus murdered Proterius and became patriarch of Alexandria in 457.<sup>114</sup> It was in response to this assertion of control by the non-Chalcedonians that Martyrius and Elias decided to flee in order to come to Palestine. It should be remembered that this Elias is the same individual that was exiled to Aila by Anastasius for refusing to recognize Severus as patriarch of Antioch.<sup>115</sup>

To circle back to the *Correspondence* this emphasis on fleeing theological controversy for the sake of maintaining the proper ascetic praxis is present in the letters of Barsanuphius and John as well. John the Prophet wrote on the validity of a monk fleeing if heresy entered a region.

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<sup>113</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 195.20-195.25. καὶ ὁ μὲν θεσπέσιος πατὴρ ἡμῶν Ἰωάννης ὁ ἐπίσκοπος καὶ ἡσυχαστὴς διὰ πολλῶν χρόνων ἐξελθὼν τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ ἐγκλειστηρίου ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ ἅπαντες οἱ τῆς εὐσεβείας τρόφιμοι, ἐξ ὧν πολλοὶ κατὰ τὰς χώρας διεσπάρησαν. In his *Life of John*, Cyril does not mention this event. In his concluding remarks to John’s life Cyril instead states that he remained in the same cell for forty-seven years (509-556) and in the appendix Cyril seems to suggest this is where he died in 558. George was only abbot of the Great Laura for seven months before being disposed and the ‘orthodox’ monks were able to regain leadership of the Laura. It would make sense that John returned to the Great Laura and his cell around then and remained there for the rest of his life.

<sup>114</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 50.20-51.

<sup>115</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 150.5-150.10.

Prompted by a monk writing to him asking this question directly, John confirmed that a monk should flee a region rather than remain and possibly be forced to violate the correct faith.<sup>116</sup> The only additional stipulations that John provides are that one should only flee if a heresy does appear, rather than just the rumor of one, and that a monk should only do so with the advice of a spiritual father. At the pressing by the monk through a second letter, John also states that if there were no fathers in that region who could properly advise him then the monk should depart to another region and seek the advice of a father there.<sup>117</sup>

Barsanuphius confirms this advice as well. Fleeing from the presence of actual persecution and violation of the “proper faith” was acceptable, but not until it actually happened. A layperson wrote to the Old Man worried about expected persecutions because “...some people, who were not in communion, were to be ordained at the command of the emperor.”<sup>118</sup> Barsanuphius responded that they should neither flee nor hide any of their belongings, but instead to trust in and repent to God. While at first this seems at odds with John’s response, a second letter from the same lay people clarifies Barsanuphius’ response. They ask him about the meaning of Matthew 10:23: “When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.” Barsanuphius simply responded: “But we have not yet been persecuted.”<sup>119</sup> His issue with fleeing was not the action itself, but that it was to be undertaken before a reason existed. The lay people from Barsanuphius’ letter and the monk from John’s needed to trust in God’s ability to

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<sup>116</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 538.

<sup>117</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 539.

<sup>118</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 786. καὶ προσδοκωμένων χειροτονεῖσθαι τινων μὴ κοινωνούντων αὐτῇ τῇ προστάξει τοῦ βασιλέως.

<sup>119</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 787. Ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς οὐπω ἐδιώχθημεν.

calm everything and his status above all other authorities, rather than give in to the temptations of cowardice and avarice.<sup>120</sup> Only when confronted with actual persecution and forced heresy should individuals flee to another area.

From the perspective of our authors these instances suggest that fleeing theological controversy was a valid choice if staying would cause spiritual harm to a monk. When push came to shove the maintenance of the proper ascetic life was more important than confronting the rise and spread of perceived heresies. While Cyril desired to present his Judean Desert fathers as firm defenders of his understanding of orthodoxy, he did not go so far as to place doctrinal orthodoxy at the core of Palestinian monasticism. Instead it remained an exterior element, an additional feature added onto the lives of monks rather than an integral element of monasticism. In both the lives of Cyril and the letters of Barsanuphius and John the notion of asceticism is divorced from doctrinal orthodoxy. The chapters in which Euthymios or Sabas served as champions of Chalcedon are divorced from his praise of their ascetic lives. While Cyril wanted to present his fathers as defenders of his orthodoxy, it was not a part of their lives as monks. It was not a reason for their perfection. The same stance can be found around Gaza. Monks were not expected to stand in defense of orthodoxy if it was going to be a detriment to their spiritual wellbeing. Throughout the sources, focus remained on the inner self and what was beneficial to it. Monks should be focused on mourning their own sins and working on correcting them through the attainment of virtues. As discussed in the way to perfection chapter, that was the focus of the monastic life in Palestine with everything else coming in a far removed second. Theologizing was too worldly, too focused on the here and now and it did not help monks achieve perfection;

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<sup>120</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 787.

it did not make them closer to God. Instead, it served as a distraction, as a way to the passions instead of away from them.

### **Orthodoxy through Miracle**

Despite the variations present in the Palestinian texts on the place of theology in the monastic life, a common thread that runs through all the texts is the emphasis on God revealing the orthodox position through interactions and miracles with monks. It was not through doctrinal debates, rhetorical strategies, or the proper use of scripture and the early church fathers that proper belief could be proven. Instead it was a revelation granted from the divine.

Despite the requirements of accepting Chalcedonian doctrine, Moschos did not appear interested in the intricacies of theology. Actual theological discussion is rather threadbare throughout the text.<sup>121</sup> Instead, God revealed the orthodox position to everyone through miracles. These occurred for the “security and assurance of the weaker souls and the conversion of the heretics, if they desire.”<sup>122</sup> For Moschos, it was for these reasons that the holy fathers preformed miracles. This perspective appears throughout the *Meadow*. There are not elegant and detailed descriptions of Chalcedonian theology or why it was proper. Instead, monks and lay Christians became aware of the proper faith through miraculous intervention. It was due to this that control of the holy places remained so important, as productive centers of the miraculous.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Theological distinctions that do appear in the *Meadow* focus primarily on Mary and her status as the Theotokos. See Moscos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 26.

<sup>122</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 213. πρὸς ἀσφάλειαν καὶ βεβαίωσιν τῶν ἀσθενεστέρων ψυχῶν, καὶ τὴν αὐτῶν ἐκείνων εἰ βούλονται ἐπιστροφὴν.

<sup>123</sup> Lorenzo Perrone, “Christian Holy Places and Pilgrimage in an Age of Dogmatic Conflicts: Popular Religion and Confessional Affiliation in Byzantine Palestine (5th-7th Centuries)” *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 48 (1998): 29-30.



Moschos relates that when Cosmiana, the wife of Germanos the Patrician, went to worship at the Holy Sepulcher, Mary met her in physical form and barred her from entering.<sup>124</sup> Moschos tells us that Cosmiana was a member of the Severan sect and that she realized it was because of her adherence to this heresy that Mary barred her from entering.<sup>125</sup> Thus, she saw the error of her ways, partook of the Eucharist, and thereafter could enter and worship. In a similar tale, after becoming the *dux* of Palestine, Gébemer tried to worship at the Holy Church of the Resurrection of Christ. Similar to Cosmiana, when he approached the church to worship a phantasmal ram stopped him from entering.<sup>126</sup> Again, he finally realized it was because he was a member of the Severan sect; he then took the Eucharist and could enter. In both instances, according to Moschos, God provided miraculous interventions to reveal the errors of the ‘heretical’ position.<sup>127</sup> The miracle of the Eucharist served as a clear identifier of the orthodox position, as only those of the ‘proper’ faith would be granted its transformation.<sup>128</sup>

To return to the Nestorian monk Theophanes mentioned above, he was not convinced of the errors of Nestorianism because of Cyriacos’ words. After the elder exhorted the importance of believing that Mary was the *Theotokos*, Theophanes responded with the rather elucidate statement: “but truly master abba, all the sects speak thus: that if you are not in communion with

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<sup>124</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 48.

<sup>125</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 48. ἥν γὰρ της αἰρέσεως Σινήρου του Ακέφάλου. διά τὸ εἶναι αὐτὴν αἰρετικήν, κωλύεται εἰσελθεῖν, καὶ ὅτι εἰ μὴ προσέλθῃ τῇ ἁγία καθολικῇ καὶ ἀποστολικῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν.

<sup>126</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 49.

<sup>127</sup> Henry Chadwick, “John Moschus and His Friend Sophronius the Sophist.” *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974): 70.

<sup>128</sup> Phil Booth argues for the increasing importance of the Eucharist in the later sixth century. See Booth, *Crisis of Empire*.

us, you are not being saved. I am a humble person, so I do not know what to do.”<sup>129</sup> It was not through oration that the monk could be convinced as every side had a similar argument. Instead, it was only through the miraculous appearance of the angel and the vision of hell that Theophanes could be convinced of the proper doctrine to accept. The tale of Abba Theodoulos and the Severan ascetic mentioned above can serve as an example here as well. The miracle of the blackened dove served, for Moschos, to confirm the Chalcedonian beliefs and convert those who had strayed from what he understood as the right path.<sup>130</sup>

In another tale Ephraim, Patriarch of Antioch (r. 527-45), converted a stylite who had previously been a follower of Severus of Antioch. Ephraim learned that the stylite had set himself up near to Hieropolis and sought him out with the intention of bringing him back into communion with the Chalcedonian church. The stylite refused to listen to Ephraim and said the only way he could be convinced would be a trial by fire. At this challenge Ephraim had wood brought and built a fire before the column, but the stylite then became concerned and would not come down from his column. To this Ephraim threw his *omophorion*<sup>131</sup> directly into the fire. It burned for three hours without being damaged at which point the stylite “was fully convinced, condemned Severus and his heresy, and proceeded into the holy church.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 26 Ὁ δὲ ἀδελφὸς λέγει τῷ γέροντι· Ὦντως, κῦρι ἀββᾶ, ὅλαι αἱ αἱρέσεις οὕτως λέγουσιν, ὅτι Εἰ μὴ μεθ’ ἡμῶν κοινωνήσης, οὐ σώζει. Τί οὖν ποιήσω, οὐκ οἶδα ἐγὼ ὁ ταπεινός.

<sup>130</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 213.

<sup>131</sup> A wool vestment worn around the shoulders indicating his status and spiritual authority as bishop.

<sup>132</sup> Moschos *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 36. Τότε ὁ στύλιτις ἰδὼν τὸ γεγονός, ἐπληροφορήθη, καὶ ἀνεθεμάτισεν Σευήρον καὶ τὴν αἵρεσιν αὐτοῦ, καὶ προῆλθεν τῇ ἁγίᾳ Ἐκκλησίᾳ, καὶ ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν τοῦ μακαρίου Ἐφραιμίου ἐκοινώνησεν, καὶ ἐδόξασεν τὸν Θεόν.

Even though Moschos more intimately connected the need for accepting orthodox doctrine with monasticism, we do not have tales filled with grand speeches extolling the superiority of Chalcedonian doctrine. Instead, orthodoxy was expressed in visible terms through the manifestation of miracles.

In the speech he made to Cyril against Origenism, Cyriacus likewise cited a revelation from God as how he recognized the “filth of his [Nonnus] heresy.”<sup>133</sup> As discussed above, while Cyriacus pointed to the ways in which the Origenists views were heretical, in the end he knew this true because of a divine revelation. This can be seen in Cyril’s description of the emperor Anastasius’ death as well. For his support of the non-Chalcedonians and exile of the Jerusalem Patriarch Elias, Cyril says that God’s wrath was brought down upon Anastasius in the form of a lightning storm that chased the emperor throughout his palace before it consumed him alone.<sup>134</sup>

Barsanuphius and John also maintain the importance of God in determining proper doctrine. In letters 603 and 604 which concerned Origenism, a monk questioned how it was possible that individuals who were regarded as holy also seemed to have accepted and perpetuated these ‘heretical’ doctrines?<sup>135</sup> Barsanuphius’ answer is simple, they did not ask God if this knowledge was true. Instead, these individuals had received these doctrines from their own teachers and assumed them to be correct. Then, after they became spiritual teachers, they continued to maintain these beliefs without ever praying to God about their teachers and

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<sup>133</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 231-231.5.

<sup>134</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 162.5-15.

<sup>135</sup> The monk explicitly mentions Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa. See Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L 604.

doctrines in order to learn whether what they said was spoken through the Holy Spirit.<sup>136</sup> Thus, according to Barsanuphius, these incorrect teachings became entangled with proper ones received from the Holy Spirit so that some figures such as Gregory of Nazianzus could maintain his status as a holy individual while still perpetuating what could be understood as false doctrines in the sixth century.<sup>137</sup> It was up to individuals to pray on doctrine in order to receive confirmation on the orthodox position.

### Conclusion

Proper beliefs mattered, however, theological speculation and theological confrontation over doctrine was not an emphasized element of the monastic life in the Judean Desert and Gaza. Whether by avoiding theological conflict when it was disrupting one's ascetic routine, fleeing a region when it became too much of a burden, or by explicitly commanding monks to avoid talking about it, both Cyril of Scythopolis and the *Correspondence* presented a negative view of theologizing. Despite the divisions that these theological disputes created in the sixth century, this understanding of the place of theology in the monastic life serves as common ground for the Palestinian sources. The emphasis was not to look outward to the disputes of the Church and empire at large, but to continue to focus on the creation of a new self.

True belief was instead meant to be given by God through prayers and miracles. While this of course was a rhetorical strategy of the authors, that does not mean we should ignore it. As

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<sup>136</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 604 εἰ διὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος τοῦ ἁγίου ἐλαλήθησαν τὰ ὑπ' αὐτῶν εἰρημένα.

<sup>137</sup> The letter writer of 604 explicitly mentions Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa as holy individuals who Origenists had claimed helped develop the theories of the pre-existence of the souls and *apokatastasis*. While the letter writer argues that the Origenists have misread their works, they also use them as examples of holy individuals who “do not speak rightly” (οὐκ ὀρθῶς λέγει). Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, 604.

can be seen especially in the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John this belief was actively passed to monastic disciples as both an explanation for doctrinal disputes and as a solution to them. The sources of both the Judean Desert and Gaza agreed that God continued to grant miracles in order to reveal the orthodox position to his followers amidst the embroiled theological controversies that rocked Christianity in late antiquity. As the Palestinian authors stressed, it was only through God that orthodoxy was revealed.

## Chapter 5. Monastic Mobility in Palestine

In 535 the emperor Justinian published his fifth novel entitled “Concerning monasteries, monks, and abbots” so as to not leave them without proper order.<sup>1</sup> The novel began by outlining the proper procedures for building new monasteries, the need for a three year evaluation period before becoming a full fledged monk, and an individual’s right to give away their property as they saw fit. Amongst these orders is a stipulation on monks moving between monasteries. The seventh chapter of the novel begins by stating that if a monk moved to a new monastery, their renounced property was to remain with the monastery in which they began. At first this seems to suggest that the issue was not with monks leaving their monastery, but with the difficulties of property rights. However, the chapter continues that abbots should not welcome monks who sought to transition to their monasteries because:

Such a life is vagrant, not at all close to monastic fortitude, nor that of a firm and constant mind, but the sign of a wandering life, seeking something in one place, another in another. Therefore, the God-beloved bishops and the so-called archimandrites should also prohibit this, persevering monastic integrity according to the sacred canons.<sup>2</sup>

These stark terms make it quite clear: true monasticism was to be a life of unflinching physical stability. Once a monk renounced the world, they were to remain in that same monastery under the supervision of the same abbot and bishop for the rest of their lives. It was only in this manner that perfection could be reached.

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<sup>1</sup> Justinian, *Novels*, in *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, Vol 3 *Iustiniani Novellae*, eds. R. Schoell and W. Kroll (Berlin, 1928), Novel 5. De monasteriis et monachis et praesulibus.

<sup>2</sup> Justinian, *Novels*, Novel 5, Ch 7. Competens autem est reverentissimos abbates non suscipere eum, qui hoc egit. Erronea namque talis est vita monachica, nullatenus tolerantiae proxima, neque constantis et persistentis animae, sed indicium habens circumlatae et aliunde alia requirentis. Quapropter etiam hoc prohibeant deo amabiles episcopi et archimandritae nuncupati, monachicam honestatem secundum sacras regulas conservantes.

This was by no means a unique perspective on what monasticism should be or the first attempt to delimit its borders. Multiple emperors, monastic leaders, theologians, and canons of church councils of the fourth through sixth centuries looked down upon and condemned mobile monks of all varieties. Whether it be the *sarabaites* of John Cassian (360-465 CE), the hypocrites in the garb of monks described by Augustine (354-430), the *gyrovagi* of the *Rule of the Master* and Benedict of Nursia (480-540), or the canons from the Council of Chalcedon (451), late antique Christian texts continued to express disapproval of the mobile monk, disengaged from a single monastery, its hierarchy, and manual labor.<sup>3</sup>

However, scholarly attention has revealed that this perspective was more of a literary idealization rather than a concrete reality, similar to the now debunked view of monasticism as a purely desert phenomenon utterly divorced from cities and towns.<sup>4</sup> Instead of a homogenous monastic movement of stability and manual labor we can now witness the abundant varieties of late antique monastic wanderers, pilgrims, and beggars each equally authentic as their fixed

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<sup>3</sup> This is not a complete list of ancient sources on the topic. Codex Theodosianus 16.3.1 for instance attempted to ban monks from cities. See Maribel Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 300-800* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 36, 69. Gregory of Nyssa, at least in certain letters, wrote against the concept of pilgrimage. See Gregory of Nyssa Ep 2, *Sources Chrétiennes* 363 ed. P. Maraval (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1990). For a discussion of this letter and Gregory's views see Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 53-57. For a discussion of this topic in general see the introduction in Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1-18; Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 6, 184-206; Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, 38, 189, 213.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity. Twentieth-anniversary edition with a new introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), lii-liii; James Goehring, "The World Engaged: The Social and Economic World of Early Egyptian Monasticism," in *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 39-52.

counterparts.<sup>5</sup> While some scholars have delved into the place of mobility within monasticism, most of these works have tended to focus on the fourth and early fifth centuries, with some concluding that by the mid-fifth century there was a solidified turning away from mobile forms of monasticism.<sup>6</sup>

My intention is to reveal the continued importance of mobility for monasticism throughout the sixth century by focusing on monastic motivations for mobility within the monastic literary productions of Palestine. Through the Greek works of Cyril of Scythopolis (ca. 525-558), John Moschos (ca. 550-619/634), Dorotheos of Gaza (ca. 506-65), and the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John the Prophet (d. 543), three central elements of an ascetic praxis are revealed which encouraged mobility: pilgrimage, the desire to seek out holy people or places; *xeniteia*, the desire to be a stranger of the world; and *hesychia*, the desire for stillness. These practices provided Palestinian monks with access to conduits of holiness and the means to achieve the virtues that an ascetic existence required which could not be attained through pure stability. In this manner, mobility was an essential element of Palestinian monasticism throughout the sixth century.

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<sup>5</sup> Caner, *Wandering, Begging monks*; Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*; Dietz, *Wandering Monks*; Georgia Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Blake Leyerle, "Landscape as Cartography in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64 (1) (1996): 119-143; Hagith Sivan, "Holy Land Pilgrimage and Western Audiences: Some Reflections on Egeria and Her Circle," *Classical Quarterly* 38 (1988): 528-535; Jaś Elsner, "The Itinerarium Burdigalense: Politics and Salvation in the Geography of Constantine's Empire," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (January: 2000): 181-95; Yoram Tsafrir, "The Maps used by Theodosius: On the Pilgrim maps of the Holy Land and Jerusalem in the Sixth Century C.E.," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 40 (1986.); Gary Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, Revised Edition (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*. 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 47-49; Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*, 243-47; Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, 42.



It is important to note that, with the partial exception of the *boskoi*, the examined monks engaged primarily in temporary periods of mobility rather than a permanent choice.<sup>7</sup> That said, I suggest that these periods of movement, and the motivations and goals behind them, are just as significant as periods of stability. Leaving the monastery undoubtedly opened monks up to a whole range of dangers and temptations. The decision, despite these possible pitfalls, to engage in forms of mobility should serve as a beacon drawing our attention and revealing the benefits and importance of movement within Palestinian monasticism.

There was a tremendous variety of motivations that encouraged monks to engage in mobility and it is around these motivations that the chapter is organized. This division serves to accentuate the variety of reasons given for why a monk would decide to move and its intrinsic place in the asceticism of the region. However, it must be stressed that these forms of religious travel were perpetually intertwined. Many of the examples I will be using could have fit into multiple sections. With that in mind, I have chosen examples that best emphasize the concepts of the sections in which they appear. Rather than build impregnable walls between pilgrims, travelers, and ascetic wanderers, I prefer to accentuate the fluidity that existed and continues to exist between various forms of travel. People could and did transition from travelers into pilgrims, from pilgrims to ascetic wanderers, and back to pilgrims again. The situation in which travelers found themselves and the state of mind that a locality created facilitated these continuous transitions.

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<sup>7</sup> The *boskoi* will be discussed below.

## Mobility and the Nature of Palestinian Monasticism

Intimately connected with the importance of monastic mobility in Palestine is the nature of monasticism itself in the region. Within the monasteries of both the Judean Desert and Gaza, an anchoritic life was deemed as spiritually superior for experienced monks. Yet all novice monks must begin with a coenobitic formation. In between these two stages lay the semi-anchoritic *laura*.<sup>8</sup> In practice, this meant that young monks, both in age and spiritual development, were required to first enter a coenobium in order to learn the foundations of a monastic life before they would be allowed to inhabit a cell. Cyril of Scythopolis reports that Sabas (439-532) required novices to learn “the psalter and the rule of psalmody and be disciplined in the strictness of monasticism.”<sup>9</sup> Further elucidating what was meant by a monastic formation, Sabas is said to have required that a monk enclosed in a cell must “possess discernment and zeal, be a combatant, sober, self-controlled, respectable, a teacher not needing teaching, sufficiently able to curb all the members of his body and a steadfast watch on his mind.”<sup>10</sup> It was only after these milestones were met that a monk was allowed to transition to a cell.

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<sup>8</sup> A grouping of anchoritic cells with a centralized church and bakery under the administration of a single abbot. See Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), 10; Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism. A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington, D.C: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 57-122; Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to The Study Of Egyptian And Palestinian Monasticism Under The Christian Empire* (Crestwood, NY.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas*, in *Kyrrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 113.8-10. ἕως οὗ τό τε ψαλτήριον μάθωσι καὶ τὸν τῆς ψαλμωιδίας κανόνα καὶ τὴν μοναχικὴν παιδευθῶσιν ἀκρίβειαν.

<sup>10</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 113.10-14. αὐτοῦ πάντοτε λέγοντος ὅτι δεῖ εἶναι τὸν κελλιότην μοναχὸν διακριτικὸν καὶ σπουδαῖον, ἀγωνιστήν, νηφάλεον, σώφρονα, κόσμιον, διδακτικὸν οὐ διδασκαλίας χρίζοντα, ἱκανὸν ὄντα τὰ τε μέλη πάντα τοῦ σώματος χαλιναγωγῆσαι καὶ τὸν νοῦν τηρεῖν ἀσφαλῶς.

Within this monastic system physical movement between coenobium and cell, or between entirely different monastic foundations, marked spiritual progress. To emphasize the place and importance of mobility within the Palestinian monastic system, it is beneficial to follow the life of a single monk. Cyriacus (449-558) came to the Laura of Euthymios in 466/67 from Corinth. He was not permitted to stay due to his youth, and so he was sent to the combined Monastery of Gerasimus where he entered the coenobium.<sup>11</sup> After learning the foundations of the monastic life, Cyriacus transitioned to the Laura of Euthymios and became a solitary in 475 following the death of Gerasimus. After another decade, Cyriacus then decided to move to the more remote Laura of Chariton (Souka).<sup>12</sup> In 525 he transitioned to the utter desert of Natoupha. After five years here, his renown had begun to grow and thus out of a desire for *hesychia*, he moved to the inner desert of Rouba. However, after another five years even this site proved to be too accessible, so Cyriacus fled to the pure desert where no anchorites stayed called Sousakim.<sup>13</sup> He stayed here for seven years before returning to the Laura of Chariton at the request of the monks. After five years in the Hanging Cave of Chariton, he returned to Sousakim in 547 where he remained for another eight years. He was then brought back to the Laura of Chariton due to his extreme old age and it was here that he died in 558. According to Cyril's dating, Cyriacus spent 92 years as a monk in the Judean Desert. During these years he transitioned between monasteries and cells eight separate times, with his longest stint amounting to forty years at the Laura of

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<sup>11</sup> The Monastery of Gerasimus featured a centralized coenobium which also served the needs of the lauritic monks living in cells surrounding the central foundation. See Patrich, *Sabas*, 254, 356.

<sup>12</sup> Cyriacus moved to Souka when the now Coenobium of Euthymios and Theoctistus split back into two separate monastic units.

<sup>13</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, in *Kyrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 228.24-25. καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τόπον πανέρημον καὶ ἀπόκρυφον, ἔνθα οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀναχωρητῶν ἔμεινεν.

Chariton. While this is by no means an insignificant amount of time, it was only portion of his monastic life.

These movements marked spiritual milestones in the life of Cyriacus. His transition from a novice to a solitary was punctuated by his transition from the Coenobium of Gerasimus to the Laura of Euthymios. After forty years as a lauritic monk at Souka, the movement to Natoupha marked his transition to the fully anchoritic life. His subsequent resettling in Rouba and Sousakim marked him reaching perfection and gaining status as a holy man capable of miraculous healing. While only a single example, this pattern is repeated throughout the sources in both the lives of the authors and their monastic subjects.<sup>14</sup> Mobility remained an integral element of Palestinian monasticism and served as signposts along their spiritual journey towards perfection.

### **Seeking a Word, Seeking a Place: Pilgrimage**

The first motivation for monastic mobility is pilgrimage, which provided monks with access to conduits of holiness through both places and people. In order to interpret this phenomenon in the context of the late antique Mediterranean world, it is first necessary to discuss some broad commonalities of the pilgrimage experience and explain how I will use the terms pilgrim and pilgrimage. Pilgrimage in late antiquity is undeniably a broad category,

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<sup>14</sup> Euthymius, Sabas, and Cyril himself are described as following this pattern. Letters 1-54 between John of Beersheba (John the Prophet) and Barsanuphius describe in detail the later stages of transitioning to the life of *hesychia* in a cell, which was marked by John's transition to the Monastery of Seridos. See Barsanuphius and John, *Correspondence*, in *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*, ed. F. Neyt and P. de Angelis, 5 Vols. *Sources chrétiennes* 426, 427, 450, 451, 468 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997-2002) L. 1-54. John Moschos began his monastic life in the coenobium of Theodosios before transitioning to the Laura of Pharan. See John Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, In *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Series Graeca, Vol. 87:3, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris, 1865), Ch 40; Henry Chadwick, "John Moschos and His Friend Sophronius the Sophist." *Journal of Theological Studies* 25 (1974): 55-56.

encompassing a wide range of motivations and goals.<sup>15</sup> This can be connected to the fact that no term marked someone as a pilgrim or on a pilgrimage in Late Antiquity.<sup>16</sup> The Latin *peregrinus* or *peregrinatio* could and did mean foreigner or traveling abroad as much as it meant pilgrim or pilgrimage.<sup>17</sup> The same is true for the Greek terms *ξενιτεία* or *ξένος*, which could mean not only pilgrimage, but also attained the ascetic ideal of a monk living in a state of alienation, as a continual stranger or foreigner in the world.<sup>18</sup> All too often, however, scholars have used the term pilgrimage without defining it. The assumption of a single homogeneous definition directly conflicts with the broad nature of the concept.

Pilgrimage is a kind of travel, travel through space and in certain situations through time. It is also an external as well as an internal journey, which includes an examination of both physical surroundings and the inner self.<sup>19</sup> The physical distance one travelled was reflective of, and intimately connected with, the spiritual journey.<sup>20</sup> That said, a religious individual who

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<sup>15</sup>Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 6; Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, 30; Robert Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994); R. A. Markus, "How on Earth Could Places Become Holy?" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (3)(1994): 257-71; Hagith Sivan, "Pilgrimage, Monasticism, and the emergence of Christian Palestine in 4th century," In *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout, 54–65, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Lorenzo Perrone, "Christian Holy Places and Pilgrimage in an Age of Dogmatic Conflicts: Popular Religion and Confessional Affiliation in Byzantine Palestine (5th-7th Centuries)" *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 48 (1998).

<sup>16</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 17-18; Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, 27; Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Handley, *Dying on Foreign Shores: Travel and Mobility in the Late-Antique West*, JRA Supplementary Series 86, (Portsmouth, NH.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2011), 55; Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 111.

<sup>18</sup> Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, 3; Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 148.

<sup>19</sup> Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, 68. Victor Turner notes that within Mexican pilgrimage, those that lived near a shrine would still travel to a distant one, though they would still participate in the festivities

traveled was not necessarily a pilgrim. Pilgrimage also requires a particular mindset in which an individual seeks—or is presented with—a spiritual connection emanating from a specific source. Such spiritual connection, the goal of pilgrimage, enabled an individual to become enveloped in his or her perceived source of holiness, not only to see, but also to touch, smell, hear, and in some cases taste what before they could only read or think about.<sup>21</sup>

With this in mind, I will be employing a broad definition of pilgrimage, influenced by the work of Georgia Frank in particular.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, I understand pilgrimage to be the act of traveling to perceived holy persons, places, or things for the sake of spiritual edification. This definition allows for and recognizes the tremendous variety of motivations for pilgrims and the varied forms that pilgrimage took. It includes those who wandered across the known world to see the land of the Bible and those who trekked to a regional saint's tomb; those who traveled to gain spiritual understanding from a living individual alongside those who sought out physical relics and miraculous healing. All these people were pilgrims in their own right. Such a definition also acknowledges the reality that the only way to differentiate between the pilgrim and the traveler is within the mind of the person on the journey.<sup>23</sup>

Pilgrimage to both people and places remained significant and pious acts for monks throughout late antiquity.<sup>24</sup> While certain pilgrims focused on a particular type of destination,

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of the local. See Victor Turner, "The Center out There: Pilgrim's Goal," *History of Religions* 12 (3)(1973): 211.

<sup>21</sup> Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, 12-13, 105, 133.

<sup>22</sup> Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, 39-40; Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> Even iconic pilgrims can, under scrutiny, fit within non-pilgrimage modes of travel. For example, Dietz argues that Egeria's travels represent a form of monastic wandering more than a pilgrimage. See Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, 51-2.

<sup>24</sup> Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, 6-7.

such as the Piacenza Pilgrim seeking relics and shrines, others such as Egeria, visited both sacred sites and holy people.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Jerome described Paula as visiting monks as well as sacred sites.<sup>26</sup> For Egeria and Paula, personal interaction with monks retained the same significance as visiting the sites associated with the sacred past. Just as there was no word that singularly meant to go on a spiritual journey, there was no single conception of what a spiritual journey entailed, especially during the fourth through sixth centuries. That said, all pilgrims still traveled toward their perceived holy for spiritual edification; they all desired to experience the sacred and feel a closer connection with the divine.<sup>27</sup> This remains true within the environments of sixth-century Palestine in which we are interested. At various times and for varied reasons, Palestinian monks undertook pilgrimages to holy individuals and holy sites.

#### *Seeking a Word: Ascetic advice*

For Palestinian monastic authors, pilgrimage to living holy individuals eclipsed the seeking of places or relics. For it was from the mouths and pens of these living holy individuals that the monastic *paideia* could be passed from generation to generation.<sup>28</sup> This tradition is encapsulated in the phrase “give us a word” (*Εἰπὸν ἡμῖν λόγον*) repeated to monastic elders

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<sup>25</sup> For a few examples of people see Egeria, *Itinerarium*, In *Itineraria et alia geographica, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 175, Edited by P. Geyer and O. Cuntz (1965), 21, 30, 40. For several examples of sites see Egeria, *Itinerarium*, 32, 42, 43, 44; Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, 51, 53.

<sup>26</sup> For examples of people see Jerome, “*Epistulae*,” In *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 55, Edited by I. Hilberg, (1910), 108.7, 108.14. For a few examples of sites see Jerome *Epistulae*, 108.9, 108.10, 108.13.

<sup>27</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 6; Aryeh Kofsky, “Renunciation of will in the monastic school of Gaza,” *Liber Annuus* 56 (2006): 321-46.

<sup>28</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 140.

throughout the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>29</sup> For our purposes, one of the best sources for discussing this practice are the journeys of John Moschos himself. For at the core of his narrative of diverse holy men and pilgrims, is the tale of Moschos and Sophronios themselves journeying for their own spiritual edification. Although the *Spiritual Meadow* is organized topically rather than geographically, a majority of the 219 tales are grounded in the locality where they were heard and in the people that told them. Instead of reading the lives of holy men at his own monastery Moschos, in his own words: “emulated the most wise bee, gathering up the spiritually profitable deeds of the fathers.”<sup>30</sup> He felt the call to seek out and speak with ascetic men and women and hear their tales himself, to learn from and compile the remarkable aspects of their lives. Moschos describes this process in detail in one of his tales and is worth quoting in full:

I took my lord Sophronios and we departed in search of an exceedingly great elder, an Egyptian, at the laura which is located eighteen miles from Alexandria. I said to the elder: ‘give us a word master abba, about how we ought to live with one another, because my lord the sophist here has a will to renounce the world.’<sup>31</sup>

Moschos then recounts eight short sayings that the elder passed along to them about the proper way to live the ascetic life. Abba John, a priest at the Monastery of the Eunuchs located near

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<sup>29</sup> The phrase is common throughout the alphabetical collection of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. See William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 171-73.

<sup>30</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Intro. ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς σοφωτάτης μελίττης τὰ ψυχοφελῆ τῶν Πατέρων ἀρυσάμενος κατορθώματα. The use of the bee simile, based upon Proverbs 6:8a-b, is prevalent throughout early Christian literature. Clement of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, and John Cassian amongst others all made use of bee similes in their works. See Mark Sheridan, *Rufus of Shotep: Homilies on the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, (Rome: 1998), 270-73.

<sup>31</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 110. Ἔλαβον τὸν κύριόν μου Σωφρόνιον, καὶ ἀπήλθομεν εἰς τὴν λαύραν τοῦ ὀκτωκαίδεκάτου ἐν Ἀλεξαν- δρεῖα πρὸς τινὰ γέροντα, πάνυ μέγαν, τῷ γένει Αἰγύπτιον· καὶ λέγω τῷ γέροντι· Εἶπον ἡμῖν λόγον, κύρι ἀββᾶ, τὸ πῶς ὀφείλομεν μετ’ ἀλλήλων καθίσαι. ὅτι ὁ κύριος ὁ σοφιστὴς βουλὰς ἔχει τοῦ ἀποτάξασθαι. Interestingly, one of the sayings of this elder encouraged Sophronios to, if he became a monk, simply settle in a cell. The location did not matter, simply that he lived there in sobriety and recollection and prayed unceasingly. One has to wonder if this was meant as a reprimand for the travels of Moschos, or if it was just meant as solid advice for a novice.



Jericho, expressed a similar sentiment. John told Moschos that: “When I was a young man, I had a desire to go to the great and famous elders, to receive their blessing and benefit from them.”<sup>32</sup>

This led him to seek out the anchorite Abba Calinicos the Great, who lived at the Great Laura.

Elders such as Calinicos served as a link to the perceived greatness of the previous generations of monks. It was from them that the present generation could gain the wisdom and the virtues of the fathers. This was a motivation for monastic pilgrimage. This theme is present in several of Moschos’ tales. For instance, a monk is said to have visited Abba Elias the solitary who lived at the community of the cave of Sabas and asked him to give a saying. Elias is said to have commented that in the days of the fathers, the virtues of poverty, humility, and continence were cherished.<sup>33</sup> When Moschos and Sophronios approached Abba John of Petra and asked him to provide them with a saying he responded in a similar manner. The elder encouraged the pair to love poverty and continence and reinforced this saying with an example from his youth in the monasteries of Scetis and the virtue of the monks that had lived there.<sup>34</sup>

While the mobile monks in other Palestinian sources are not as far roaming as Moschos, choosing instead to seek out individuals within the local communities of *Palestina Prima*, the practice of seeking out elders is still present. Cyril described Euthymios as engaging in a similar practice. After arriving at Jerusalem and venerating the holy places, Euthymios is said to have “...visited the inspired fathers in the desert, observing the virtue and way of life of each one and

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<sup>32</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch.137. Ὅτε ἡμιν νεώτερος, ἐπόθουν ἀπέρχεσθαι πρὸς τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ ὀνομαστοὺς γέροντας, ὥστε εὐλογεῖσθαι καὶ ὠφελεῖσθαι παρ’ αὐτῶν.

<sup>33</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 52. For other instances see Ch 130 & 168.

<sup>34</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 113.

impressing it upon his soul.”<sup>35</sup> It was only after this act of pilgrimage and absorbing the advice of the fathers that Euthymios settled into his own cell at the Laura of Pharan.

Barsanuphius confirms the usefulness of seeking out elders as well. When asked by a monk if he should go to visit an elder that lived nearby, Barsanuphius responded that visiting him would be a good thing.<sup>36</sup> He warns the monk to not talk idly with him, but instead to imitate the encounters of the fathers and ask the elder to “Tell us a word of life, and in what manner we may find the way of God and then ask the elder to pray for him and subsequently leave.”<sup>37</sup>

Barsanuphius also suggested that a pilgrimage to elders provided an opportunity to test a monk’s ascetic discipline and gage their development. When visiting an elder the temptation to idly talk is presented as the challenge. Dorotheos expands on this concept: “The solitude of the cell uplifts him while men test him.”<sup>38</sup> Meeting and interacting with others allowed a monk to examine their inner condition and test their ability to resist the temptation that arose from social situations. If the monk is not able to do so, then his weakness would become apparent and the monk could lament and repent for his weakness.<sup>39</sup> Thus, one danger of travel and social interaction could be turned into an advantage for the properly minded monk.

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<sup>35</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, in *Kyrrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der alchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 14.5-14.10 παραβαλὼν δὲ καὶ τοῖς κατὰ τὴν ἔρημον θεοφόροις πατράσι καὶ τὴν ἐκάστου ἀρετὴν καὶ πολιτείαν καταμαθὼν καὶ τῇ ἐαυτοῦ ψυχῇ ἐνσφραγισάμενος.

<sup>36</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 189.

<sup>37</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 189. Εἰπέ ἡμῖν λόγον ζωῆς, πῶς εὐρίσκομεν τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

<sup>38</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza. *Discourses and Letters*. In *Dorothee de Gaza: Œuvres spirituelles*, édité and translated by Lucien Regnault and J. de Préville, *Sources Chrétiennes* 92. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1963), 1.180.22-23. Τὸ κελλίον γὰρ ὑποῖ, οἱ δὲ ἄνθρωποι δοκιμάζουσιν.

<sup>39</sup> Dorotheos, *Discourses*, 1.180.22-23.

Despite the possible dangers, both spiritual and temporal, physically seeking out and speaking with virtuous and wise monks and those that had first-hand knowledge of them provided a more direct and visceral access to monastic *paideia* and models of holiness. While these monks were part of a local monastic community, under the supervision of their own abbot and spiritual director, they recognized the broader monastic community and the fact that there were elders elsewhere that could provide them with a better understanding of the ascetic life and what was needed to spiritually progress towards perfection.

### *Seeking a Place*

Despite being connected with the more traditional understanding of pilgrimage, within the Palestinian monastic milieu pilgrimages to places were subordinated to people. In addition, monks who did seek out holy sites are not depicted as seeking out miraculous cures or relics, but instead just sought to venerate or pray at them.<sup>40</sup> They provided a more intimate access to the holy, the elongated ladder to the divine temporarily shortened. In contrast to pilgrimage to individuals Cyril, John Moschos, Barsanuphius and John felt no compulsion to describe the act, or benefits, of pilgrimage to places. Writing the simple fact that a monk decided to seek out a holy site was a self-evident explanation for the pilgrimage. Thus, in a letter written to John the Prophet, a monk recounted that when his abbot sent him on an errand to Jerusalem, he took the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the Jordan to pray.<sup>41</sup> He asked John if he had acted correctly since he had done so without explicitly asking his abbot for permission. John answered no, that

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<sup>40</sup> In this way, these monastic pilgrims have more in common with the earlier Egeria than the contemporary Piacenza Pilgrim, who found relics and miracles around every corner.

<sup>41</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L.356 Εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν Πόλιν ἐπέμφθην δι' ἀπόκρισιν, καὶ κατέβην εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην εὐξασθαι.

the monk should not have done so without a blessing from his abbot. However, neither the monk nor John felt the need to explain the reasoning or benefit of going to the Jordan to pray. It was clear for those involved why a monk would want to go to the Jordan.

Moschos also maintained the importance of such journeys to places for his monks. When Thelalaïos, the disciple of the anchorite Abba George, perceived that he was going to die soon, he desired his last action to be to go to Jerusalem. George agreed and together they went to the holy city so that Thelalaïos could "...venerate the Holy Cross and the Holy Sepulcher of Christ our God..."<sup>42</sup> Similar to the worried monk, the two also used the pilgrimage to Jerusalem to take a side trip down to the Jordan to be baptized.<sup>43</sup>

Pilgrimages to the shrines of saints, so often sought out for relics or presented in miraculous terms, are described simply as being visited for the sake of prayer as well. In another of Moschos' tales we are told of John the Anchorite who lived in a cave outside of Jerusalem who went on multiple pilgrimages and wanderings.<sup>44</sup> Over weeks to months at a time John is reported to have wandered the wilderness, venerated the holy places of Jerusalem, as well as visited the shrines of Thecla at Seleucia, Sergios at Rusāfa<sup>45</sup>, and John at Ephesus. It was not through these locations but instead through the anchorite himself that miracles were manifested, as a candle which he offered in prayer to Mary would always remain alight in his cell for the

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<sup>42</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 91. Λάβε με εἰς τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, ἵνα προσκυνήσω τὸν ἅγιον σταυρὸν, καὶ τὴν ἁγίαν Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἀνάστασιν.

<sup>43</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 91. Καὶ προσκυνησάντων αὐτῶν τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ σεβασμίους τόπους, κατελθόντων δὲ καὶ εἰς τὸν ἅγιον Ἰορδάνην, καὶ βαπτισθέντων.

<sup>44</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 180.

<sup>45</sup> The shrine of Sergios at Rusāfa/Sergiopolis became a highly important pilgrimage destination in late antiquity. See Irfan Shahîd "Arab Christian Pilgrimages in the Proto-Byzantine Period (V-VII Centuries)" in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 373-389.

duration of his travels.<sup>46</sup> Moschos does not depict miracles as emanating from places but instead God granted them to monks. Holy places were to be used for communion with the divine rather than miracles. These sites, made holy through their interaction with individuals offered monks a greater connection to the divine. Despite the possible dangers of travel, praying at these sites offered monks a connection that could not be gained elsewhere. The spiritual benefits of these pilgrimages, so obvious to our authors that they did not need to explain it, was simply a fact.

This concise description of pilgrimage to holy sites stands in contrast to other contemporary accounts, highlighting the variety of pilgrimage in late antiquity. This can be witnessed if we examine the itinerary of the Piacenza Pilgrim. The anonymous individual known by this moniker travelled from Northern Italy throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, including Jerusalem, on an extended pilgrimage before returning home and producing an *itinerarium* in the late sixth century. The Piacenza Pilgrim visited the holy sites of Jerusalem in the 570s and provided a detailed recounting of his visit to both the holy cross and sepulcher.

For the Piacenza Pilgrim the act of venerating the holy cross involved the adoration and kissing of the cross itself along with the title that had been placed above Jesus' head.<sup>47</sup> A miraculous star would also appear above the cross while it was shown to the gathered pilgrims. The area that housed the cross had numerous other relics from the crucifixion as well. The Piacenza Pilgrim was able to drink from the sponge and gaze upon the cup that Jesus had blessed at the last supper. In addition, an icon of Mary along with her girdle and head wrapping were

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<sup>46</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 180.

<sup>47</sup> Piacenza Pilgrim, "Antonini Placentini Itinerarium," in *Itineraria et alia geographica*, CCSL 175, edited by P. Geyer, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965), XX.

present so as to fully envelop the pilgrim in the life and death of Christ.<sup>48</sup> The Holy Sepulcher was equally endowed with miracles and relics. The Piacenza Pilgrim described the presence of an ever-burning lamp from which pilgrims would receive a small amount of oil as a blessing.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, he described piles of dirt being brought into the tomb and pilgrims taking small scoops of the then blessed soil with them. It is entirely possible that the act of prayer and veneration mentioned in the Palestinian sources included these types of actions, that Cyril and Euthymios similarly carried away small relics of oil and dirt from their visits to the Holy Sepulcher and Cross. However, that is not what Palestinian monastic authors chose to focus on. The emphasized motivations focused how such sites benefited the monk through a connection with the divine rather than the divine manifesting itself in a miraculous manner.

Cyril presented a visit to the holy sites of Jerusalem as an intrinsic act in the transition to the monastic life in the Judean Desert. His own experience of entering the Judean Desert serves as an example of this. Having already entered the monastic life in his hometown of Scythopolis, Cyril departed for Jerusalem with the intention of seeking out John the Hesychast as a spiritual father and transitioning to the Judean Desert. First, however, upon arriving at Jerusalem Cyril “...venerated the holy and revered places together with the life-giving wood of the all-holy Cross.”<sup>50</sup> It was only after this that he sought out John’s advice on which monastery to enter. This pattern is repeated with the arrival of several other of Cyril’s monks. Euthymios himself

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<sup>48</sup> Piacenza Pilgrim, *Itinerarium*, XX.

<sup>49</sup> Piacenza Pilgrim, *Itinerarium*, XVIII.

<sup>50</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymios*, 72 ἐγὼ τοίνυν ἐν τῇ ἁγίᾳ πόλει γεγωνὼς καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ σεβασμίους προσκυνήσας τόπους σὺν τῷ ζωοποιῶι ξύλῳ τοῦ παναγίου σταυροῦ. Cyril retells this event of his life in more detail in his *life* of John the Hesychast. However, he only mentions celebrating the consecration of the New Church of the Mother of God in Jerusalem. See Cyril, *Life of John the Hesychast*, in *Kyrillos Von Skythopolis*, ed. E. Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, 49/2 (Leipzig, 1939), 216.15-20.

venerated the holy Cross, the Church of the holy Resurrection, and the other holy places.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, Conon—who was elected abbot of the Great Laura in 548—is described as venerating the holy places before first entering the Great Laura.<sup>52</sup> In each of these cases the seeking out of the holy places of Jerusalem, a pilgrimage to them, was presented as the first step in becoming a monk of the Judean Desert.<sup>53</sup>

It is important to note, however, that Cyril does not mention established monks regularly undertaking pilgrimages to the surrounding holy sites. While venerating and living in proximity to the holy places of Jerusalem were certainly important for Cyril, the contention that the *entire* point of becoming a monk of the Judean Desert was to live in proximity to holy places is exaggerated.<sup>54</sup> Instead, it was the desert itself along with the monastic fathers that lived there that served as the prime reason for becoming a monk in the region. If we return to the examples of Cyril and Euthymios this can be witnessed. In both accounts, Cyril describes the motivation for coming to Palestine as a “...desire to inhabit its desert.”<sup>55</sup> The desire was to live in the desert for

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<sup>51</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 14.5. Οὗτος ὁ μέγας πατήρ ἡμῶν Εὐθύμιος τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος αὐτὸν ὁδηγήσαντος ἦλθεν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα τῷ εἰκοστῷ ἐνάτῳ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἡλικίας χρόνῳ καὶ προσκυνήσας τὸν ἅγιον Σταυρὸν καὶ τὴν ἁγία. Ἀνάστασιν καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς σεβασμίους τόπους, παραβαλὼν δὲ καὶ τοῖς κατὰ τὴν ἔρημον θεοφόροις πατράσι καὶ τὴν ἐκάστου ἀρετὴν καὶ πολιτείαν καταμαθὼν καὶ τῇ ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῇ ἐνσφραγισάμενος.

<sup>52</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 196.24-26 ἐλθόντα δὲ εἰς προσκύνῃσιν τῶν ἁγίων τόπων.

<sup>53</sup> While chronologically outside the scope of this chapter, it is worth mentioning that when Abba Isaiah came to Palestine from Egypt, he undertook a pilgrimage to Jerusalem before initially settling in a cell near Eleutheropolis. Peter the Iberian initially fled to Palestine as a pilgrim before entering the monastery of Melania the Younger on the Mount of Olives. See Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza*, 20-21, 24, 62-71.

<sup>54</sup> John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-631* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 197.

<sup>55</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 14.1. In describing his own entrance, Cyril says his reason was the “desire to take up my abode in the desert.” See Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 71.20.

the stillness it provided. The visiting of the holy sites was an important element, but not the prime motivation for Cyril.

In a unique tale, Moschos reiterates a benefit of pilgrimage mentioned by Dorotheos in the previous section: testing and strengthening a monk's ascetic discipline. Theodore the future Bishop of Rossos, related to Moschos a multi-site pilgrimage in which he participated. Peter, who was a native of Pontus, came to Theodore who was at the time living at the Pyrgia Laura near the Jordan, and asked him to join him on a trip to Mount Sinai in order to pray.<sup>56</sup> After Theodore agreed to join Peter and they had crossed the Jordan, Peter suggested that they should fast until they arrived at Mount Sinai. Such an act was beyond Theodore's physical and spiritual abilities, but Peter kept his resolution. At Mount Sinai the two monks received communion and Peter broke his fast. They then continued their pilgrimage, traveling to the shrine of St. Menas in Alexandria and from St. Menas to Jerusalem, receiving communion at each site and fasting in-between. In addition to the benefit of visiting these sites, Peter used the pilgrimage to further his ascetic discipline through miraculously long fasts. The pilgrimages provided him with an opportunity to strengthen the control he had over his physical body as well as provide Theodore—and Moschos' audience—with an example of ascetic mastery.

As mentioned at the start of this section and evidenced through the examples, Palestinian monastic authors did not connect the holy places they visited with miracles. In contrast with the contemporary account of the Piacenza Pilgrim, for whom sites and relics were endowed with the miraculous, monastic pilgrims traveled for the sake of prayer and veneration of the holy. Within the examined works miracles were instead granted by God to holy individuals. Whether it be a trip to venerate and pray at holy sites or to a renowned monastic elder in order to be blessed and

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<sup>56</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 100.



receive advice on how to live an ascetic life, Palestinian monastic authors saw benefit in pilgrimage. It was integrated into the monastic communities of Palestine, both in the Judean Desert and Gaza. To be a monk in Palestine was not to permanently remain within the confines of a sole monastery. This form of mobility provided monks a direct connection with the divine through places and people that they deemed as conduits of holiness. While, from a monastic standpoint, there were many dangers to travel, the benefits outweighed them. This knowledge was something that could not be gained by remaining rooted in a single monastery just as reading a pilgrim's itinerary could not provide the same experience as physically experiencing a holy site. The benefits of mobility outweighed the possible dangers for our monastic authors and the multitude of mobile monks described engaging in this form of pilgrimage. The goal of the ascetic life, the creation of a new self or reaching perfection was a lifelong process which required assistance from spiritually advanced individuals and the divine itself. Pilgrimage was one of the vehicles by which they could be reached.

### *Xeniteia*

*Xeniteia*, the ascetic desire to be a stranger to the world, encouraged monks to become mobile.<sup>57</sup> Physical removal from all known people and places could help monks achieve true detachment from the world, to truly die unto it.<sup>58</sup> Barsanuphius, writing to a fellow Egyptian monk that had just arrived to Seridos' monastery, encapsulated this in a single sentence. He

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<sup>57</sup> Caner, *Wandering, Begging monks*, 25, 30; Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 148-162; Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos' Spiritual Meadow: Authority and Autonomy at the End of the Antique World*. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 2; Dietz, "Monastic Rules and Wandering Monks," in *Wandering Monks*, 69-106; Patrich, *Sabas*, 43; Graham Gould, "Moving on and staying put in the Apophthegmata Patrum," in *Studia patristica* Vol 20 ed. E Livingstone (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 231-37.

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan L. Zecher, *The Role of Death in the Ladder of Divine Ascent and the Greek Ascetic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Ch 5.

stated “Brother, we are foreigners and so let us become foreigners, not measure ourselves as being anything, so that no one counts us as anything; and then we will be at rest.”<sup>59</sup>

The prevalence of this trend in Palestine can be witnessed in the lives of the monastic fathers of both Gaza and the Judean Desert as none of them were natives to the province. Chariton, one of the contenders for the title of founder of monasticism in Palestine, was from Lycaonia in Anatolia. All seven of the monastic figures whose lives Cyril recorded were not from any part of Palestine: Euthymios and John the Hesychast grew up in Armenia, Sabas, Theognius, and Theodosios were from Cappadocia, Cyriacus from Corinth, and finally Abraamius was from Syria. Gerasimus, another of the fathers of the Judean Desert, was born in Lycia. Barsanuphius was from Egypt. Out of our known monastic authors only Cyril was a native of Palestine, and even he came from the second province. John Moschos was born in Cilicia.<sup>60</sup> Dorotheos was born in Antioch.<sup>61</sup> All these individuals adopted the persona of the foreigner as part of their desire to come and dwell in Palestine.

This status as a stranger was presented as an additional step to achieve virtue. This can be seen in the life of a Roman monk named Christopher from the monastery of Theodosios as related by Moschos.<sup>62</sup> For ten years, Christopher spent each night praying and making prostrations on the steps of the cave of Theodosios in addition to fasting and physical labor during the day. However, a vision revealed that this practice was not enough and that greater

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<sup>59</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 55. Ἀδελφέ, ξένοι ἐσμέν, ξένοι γενώμεθα καὶ μὴ μετρήσωμεν ἑαυτοὺς ἐν τινι, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἡμᾶς ψηφίζει καὶ ἀναπανόμεθα.

<sup>60</sup> Phil Booth, *Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2014), 44.

<sup>61</sup> Jennifer L. Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza* (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 62.

<sup>62</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 105.

effort was required. Christopher decided that the greater effort needed was to become a foreigner so he fled from his monastery to Mount Sinai and stayed there for fifty years before he received another vision which told him he could return to the monastery of Theodosios so he could die with his fathers.<sup>63</sup> Even the strict ascetic regimen that Christopher maintained for an extended period was not enough. His removal from his monastic home and spiritual fathers is presented as not only an option, but as a necessity to achieve perfection.

Seeking exile could also help a monk gain humility. A monk who had been a disciple of Barsanuphius had been troublesome and was asked to leave the monastery for a time for his own benefit as well as that of the community. The monk returned but was still causing issues by scorning another monk. Writing to the monk and admonishing his actions, Barsanuphius stated that “I thought that, having lived as a foreigner, you would have given up your righteousness and gained humility.”<sup>64</sup> The troublesome monk’s time as a stranger was expected to have helped him learn virtue.

### *The Boskoi*

Perhaps the most radical variant of this tradition was the lifestyle of the *boskoi*, or grazers. These individuals took the ideal of being a detached stranger to the world to its most extreme conclusion, fleeing all connections with the lay world and the monastery in favor of a natural existence in the wilderness. They are described as living a peripatetic life in the deserts of Palestine, generally living naked and subsisting on natural vegetation, thus their moniker.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 105.

<sup>64</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 549. Ὡστε ἐνόμισα ὅτι ἐξενίτευσας, ἀφῆκες τὸ δικαίωμα καὶ ἐκέρδης ταπείνωσιν

<sup>65</sup> Moschos describes Abba Sophronios in this exact manner. See Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 159. The *boskoi* also appear in Syria. See Caner, *Wandering, Begging, Monks*, 50-53.

The *boskoi* are mentioned more frequently in the literature of the Judean Desert, appearing in the works of Cyril and Moschos. Their presence throughout the sixth century stands in contrast to the singular image of Judean Desert monasticism as institutionally minded colonists of the wilderness.<sup>66</sup> The *boskoi* did not seek to maintain relations with the Patriarch of Jerusalem nor make the desert a city. They did not conform to the idealized hierarchy of the monastic system. The exile that the life of a *boskos* offered provided an alternative path to perfection. They became consumed by and part of the natural world, throwing off all elements of the corrupted world in an attempt to reach the purity of a natural existence.<sup>67</sup> Moschos in particular revered the *boskoi*, frequently presenting them as sources of holiness and ascetic virtue.<sup>68</sup> A *boskos* by the name of Poemen is presented as a spiritual director to even the more advanced monks. Agathonikos—who at the time was *hegoumenos* of the coenobium of Castellium—told Moschos how when he had troubled thoughts, he chose to go down to Rouba to visit Poemen the *boskos*.<sup>69</sup> It was to him that Agathonikos felt comfortable with confessing his thoughts and seeking counsel.<sup>70</sup> Moschos also relates a tale told by Abba George, archimandrite of the monastery of Theodosios, about the miraculous finding of the body of Peter the grazer when he was building the Church of Saint Kerykos.<sup>71</sup> The grazer appeared in a dream to George,

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<sup>66</sup>Jan-Eric Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), 110.

<sup>67</sup> Ihssen, *John Moschos*, 33-35.

<sup>68</sup> In addition to the tales already cited, Moschos' chapters 19 and 154 are told by grazers.

<sup>69</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch 167.

<sup>70</sup> Poemen received the benefit of befriending a lion, which kept him warm during winter nights.

<sup>71</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 92.

revealing his body's location and the archimandrite immediately enlarged the plan of the church to include a monument to inter him in.<sup>72</sup>

Interestingly, and in line with the other forms of mobility previous discussed, it seems that some monks only temporarily adopted the life of a *boskoi* and would later reenter a monastery.<sup>73</sup> Moschos relates the tale of Abba Gerontios who at the time was the *hegoumenos* of the monastery of Euthymios but had previously lived as a grazer beyond the Dead Sea.<sup>74</sup> In the same vein, Cyril mentions that grazers were some of Sabas' first disciples when he founded the Great Laura.<sup>75</sup> While some monks maintained the lifestyle perpetually, it could also be adopted as a means to help achieve virtue.<sup>76</sup> Along with the coenobium, laura, and the anchoritic cell the existence of the *boskoi* was another valid option for Palestinian monks. The goal was the attainment of virtue, of climbing closer towards perfection. For many monks, physical separation was deemed necessary. Palestinian spiritual directors understood that this goal could be achieved in a number of ways, which varied based on the needs and experience of an individual monk.

This idea can be extended to the concept of *xeniteia* as a whole. Becoming a stranger was an ascetic method of putting away the old self and creating the new self on the way to perfection. The lengths of time varied depending on the individual monk and the goals of the practice. For several monks mentioned above, the detachment of *xeniteia* was a temporary measure taken and when they had gained the benefit of such a life they could spiritually progress and return to the

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<sup>72</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 92.

<sup>73</sup> See Brenda Ihssen's discussion of the *boskoi* in Moschos. Ihssen, *John Moschos* 33-35.

<sup>74</sup> Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 21.

<sup>75</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 99.19.

<sup>76</sup> Moschos relates that Abba Sophronios the Grazer spent 70 years as a *boskoi*. See Moschos, *Spiritual Meadow*, Ch. 159.

monastery. The focus, at least in the literature, was on the requirements and needs of the individual monk. After receiving a monastic formation in a coenobium, a monk's decision to move to a *laura*, or anchoritic cell, or the life of *xeniteia* were equally valid options, as long as they were undertaken with the blessing of their spiritual director and done so for the benefit of the soul.

### **Mobility for the Sake of *Hesychia***

While perhaps something of a paradox when understood in purely physical terms, the ascetic practice of *heyschia* was in fact a motivator for mobility.<sup>77</sup> The desire for stillness and solitude encouraged monks to adopt a life of enclosure, either for five days a week, or complete as was the case with Barsanuphius, John the Prophet, and John the Hesychast. However, the acclaim that holy individuals could receive, especially from lay individuals, is presented as a continual obstacle for monks throughout the literature. If a monk could not stem the flow of these individuals, in many cases they would seek out a more remote location and cell.

Cyriacus for instance, while staying with a disciple in the desert of Natoupha healed the son of a man from Thekoa who subsequently spread the tale. Many people to begin to seek him out for their own cures, which caused him to flee to the inner desert of Rouba. However, his location was discovered and individuals continued to bring the sick to him which caused him to

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<sup>77</sup> For more on *hesychia* see Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1993), 109, 175; Kallistos Ware, "Silence in Prayer: The Meaning of Hesychia" in *One yet Two: Monastic Tradition East and West: Orthodox-Cistercian Symposium, Oxford Univ, 1973* ed. M Basil Pennington (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1976), 22-47; David Mezynski, "The Effects of the Origenist Controversy on the Pastoral Theology of Barsanuphius and John," (PhD Diss., Fordham University, 2012), 63-64; Benedicta Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 250; John Chrysavgis, "Hesychasm," in *Encyclopedia of Monasticism* Vol 1 ed. William M. Johnston (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), 586-87; John Chrysavgis, "Solitude, Silence, and Stillness: Light from the Palestinian Desert," in *The Philokalia: A classic text of Orthodox spirituality*, ed. Brock Bingham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 228-29.

flee again, this time to a place that was “...pure desert and hidden away, where no anchorites stayed.”<sup>78</sup> It was here in the area called Sousakim that Cyriacus was able to find the stillness that he sought.

It was the continual stream of individuals seeking cures and exorcisms which the author of Chariton’s *vita* cites as what disrupted his tranquility and conversation with the Lord through prayer and caused him to flee from his laura at Pharan.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the crowds of lay people were a source of disturbance and distraction for the other brethren of the laura, going so far as stopping others from “acquiring additional perfections.”<sup>80</sup> Chariton’s decision to flee then was not only for the sake of his own maintenance of *hesychia*, but for the sake of his disciples as well.

The praise and importuning for cures that individuals heaped upon Euthymios “vexed” him as he remembered the “stillness he had when a solitary ascetic.”<sup>81</sup> This caused him to flee from the monastery he helped to found with Theoctistus to Rouba with a single disciple. In addition to the distraction that a stream of miracle seeking individuals could cause, the danger of praise and renown was central to the decision to flee. Such praise could cause the monk to become full of pride, negatively impacting the monk’s way of life. When a monk living in stillness asked John the Prophet about this exact issue, he replied that the individual must take

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<sup>78</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*. 228.24-25. καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τόπον πανέρημον καὶ ἀπόκρυφον, ἔνθα οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀναχωρητῶν ἔμεινεν.

<sup>79</sup> *Life of Chariton*, in *Bulletin de l’institut Historique Belge de Rome* 21 ed. G. Garitte (1941), 16.6-7. It was for this same reason that Chariton also fled from Douka, his second laura that he founded after fleeing Pharan.

<sup>80</sup> *Chariton*, 18.1-3.

<sup>81</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 21.20-23. Βλέπων δὲ ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν Εὐθύμιος πολλοὺς ἰάσεως ἔνεκεν ὀχλοῦντας αὐτῷ καὶ μνημονεύων τῆς προτέρας ἡσυχίας ἣς εἶχετο ὅτε κατὰ μόνας ἡσκεῖτο, ἐδυσχέραινε σφόδρα καὶ ἐδυσφόρει διὰ τὸ οὕτως ὑπὸ πολλῶν ὀχλεῖσθαι τε καὶ δοξάζεσθαι.

care not to take pleasure in or give consent to such praise.<sup>82</sup> Chariton's author commented in a similar manner, suggesting that such vainglory could obscure virtue as rust does iron.<sup>83</sup>

The decision to flee, instead of denying visitors, can be connected to the desire to not show favoritism to anyone. In the case of monks living in stillness, this meant either accepting all visitors or none at all. In a tale that echoes one told of Arsenius in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Euthymios declines a visit from Anastasius the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Euthymios had prophesized that Anastasius would become patriarch and after it came to pass he wished to return to the holy man. To this request Euthymios responded that while he would happily receive Anastasius if he came, this would also cause him to have to receive every visitor and no longer be able to stay in his laura.<sup>84</sup> The flood of visitors that a visit from the patriarch would spawn is presented as a possibly disastrous event for the life of stillness that Euthymios wished to maintain and his response to such an event was flight.<sup>85</sup>

Barsanuphius also cites the same tale of Arsenius in his explanation for not meeting an Egyptian monk in person. For, if Barsanuphius were to open his cell up to this monk, then he would be required to open it up to everyone because he strove to not make a distinction between anyone.<sup>86</sup> Barsanuphius confirms this point in another letter when a monk asked if, while living in stillness, he should be in the company of only certain people or if he should avoid everyone

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<sup>82</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 204.

<sup>83</sup> *Chariton*, 16.12-13.

<sup>84</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 52.10-19.

<sup>85</sup> During Sabas' first exile in the region of Scythopolis, Cyril connects his decision to return to the Great Laura with him being plagued by people of the world. See Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 120.5-10.

<sup>86</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 55. Οὐ γὰρ ποιῶ διαφορὰν ἀνθρώπου καὶ ζῷ.



altogether. Barsanuphius responded that rejecting some and not others would be discrimination, and that an individual who could instead show no favoritism would be best.<sup>87</sup>

Fleeing the monastery or completely enclosing oneself are two sides of the same coin. They were both strategies for achieving a life of stillness by limiting contact with other, especially lay, individuals. For monks that were not willing or able to cut off all contact, transitioning to a new region when their renown became too much of a temptation or distraction was a viable strategy for maintaining their own spiritual wellbeing and that of their monastic brothers.

### **Lenten Wandering**

An important and unique form of temporary mobility that combined the notions of *xeniteia* and *hesychia* within the Judean Desert was the Lenten wanderings undertaken by the monastic elders. This practice possibly originated in Anatolia and was brought to the Judean Desert by Euthymios according to Cyril.<sup>88</sup> Euthymios had adopted the practice of retiring to an uninhabited mountain for Lent while still living as a monk in Armenia and maintained the practice after transitioning to Palestine. Once dwelling in the Judean Desert, Euthymios is described as leaving yearly after the Epiphany and returning for Palm Sunday, wandering the desert of Coutila.<sup>89</sup> This period of wandering served as a spiritual cleanser. The exile of the *paneremos* offered a severance from most individuals and a greater opportunity for stillness,

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<sup>87</sup> Barsanuphius, *Correspondence*, L. 204.

<sup>88</sup> Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 82.

<sup>89</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 14-15.9. Binns argued that this period coincided with the period of higher rain, allowing the desert to be more hospitable for the wandering monks. Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ*, 105.

which would allow a greater connection with God.<sup>90</sup> Through solitude, prayer and fasting, the body was subdued, and the soul granted nourishment.<sup>91</sup>

This exile was, however, never completely solitary. The Lenten sojourns provided the opportunity for the elders to teach their select disciples the higher virtues.<sup>92</sup> When Euthymios retreated to the desert, he brought Theoctistus along with him, formalizing the practice of bringing along disciples within the Judean Desert. Euthymios appears to have taken with him promising and advanced monks. Thus, Martyrius and Elias, previous archimandrites from Nitria and future patriarchs of Jerusalem, were invited to wander with him along with Gerasimus.<sup>93</sup> Gerasimus adopted the practice in his own right, taking individuals from his own monastery with him for Lent.<sup>94</sup> When Sabas was still living in the coenobium, Euthymios one year saw him full of desire and invited him along for the Lenten journey.<sup>95</sup> After becoming a hermit living outside of the coenobium, Sabas became a regular member of Euthymios' Lenten journeys along with Domitian, Euthymios' long time disciple.<sup>96</sup>

After the death of Euthymios, Sabas continued the practice of Lenten wanderings on his own. Sabas started leaving slightly later in order to celebrate the commemoration of Euthymios

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<sup>90</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 14-15.9.

<sup>91</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 14-15.9. διηνεκῶς δὲ ὑποπιάζοντες τὸ σῶμα καὶ δουλαγωγοῦντες τὴν πνευματικὴν τροφὴν προσέφερον τῇ ψυχῇ.

<sup>92</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 94.14-19.

<sup>93</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 50.20-51.

<sup>94</sup> See Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 225.5-15.

<sup>95</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 56.20-57.10. It was on this journey that Sabas' inexperience with the desert caused him to become exhausted. Euthymios' experience allowed him to dig for and find water to stabilize the young Sabas.

<sup>96</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 94.14-20.

before departing.<sup>97</sup> He continued to bring disciples along with him on these spiritual journeys, with Agapêtus being mentioned as accompanying him on several occasions.<sup>98</sup> While Sabas continued the practice itself, the locations he traveled between seems to have changed. During one Lenten journey, Cyril states that Sabas and Agapêtus traveled north along the Jordan and prayed at Chrosia, Heptapêgus and other unnamed holy places as far north as Panias (Caesarea Philippi).<sup>99</sup> Rather than depart to the utter desert and seek complete solitude, Sabas used the period of wandering to visit holy locations throughout the region. The core goal of the journey was still the same, to strengthen the spiritual by controlling the physical through self-imposed exile, but the location varied based on the individuals' needs.<sup>100</sup> Sabas also used the period of wandering as a way to scout out and cleanse new locations for future monasteries. In 492 Sabas used his Lenten wandering to cleanse the hill of Castellium of demons through ceaseless prayer and divine praises.<sup>101</sup> It was only after Lent that Sabas brought other fathers to the spot to establish a coenobium. Cyril relates that the Coenobium of the Cave was founded in the same fashion when Sabas found the cave during another of his wanderings.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 106.5-15. Cyril tells that Euthymius' commemoration took place of the 20<sup>th</sup> of January.

<sup>98</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 107.20-108.

<sup>99</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 108.1-20.

<sup>100</sup> During Sabas' wandering Cyril tells that he fasted, subsisting only on communion on Saturdays and Sundays, emphasizing a desire to control the physical body. Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 108.25-109. One year Cyril tells that Sabas, taking an elder named Paul with him, retired in a cave less than two miles from the Great Laura for Lent. See Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 126.10-20.

<sup>101</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 110.5.

<sup>102</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 126.10.

This practice of Lenten wandering was primarily adopted and maintained by the leading monastic fathers of the Judean Desert as a temporary method of achieving *xeniteia* and *hesychia*. The wanderings provided Euthymios, Sabas, and Gerasimus with an alternative way to achieve these virtues while maintaining their responsibilities as *hegoumenoi*.<sup>103</sup> In addition to their status as holy men and spiritual directors, the communal and administrative requirements of this position prevented them from being able to effectively practice anchoritic enclosure let alone a rootless existence which Palestinian asceticism encouraged. Cyril in fact presented the process of establishing and heading a monastery as directly in contrast to *hesychia* and *xeniteia* throughout his lives. Euthymios did not want to found a monastery of any type or accept other monks due, in part, to his “desire for *hesychia*.”<sup>104</sup> It was only after receiving a vision of God which told him to accept others that Euthymios conceded and began his *laura*.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Sabas only began to accept others at what would become the Great Laura after being persuaded by the word of God.<sup>106</sup> Cyril’s conception of monasticism was one of personal asceticism, of perfection being a state of alienation from the human realm and a spiritual existence in communion with God. However, to have the possibility to reach such a state monasteries and spiritual directors were needed to train and pass along their wisdom. Individuals such as Sabas and Euthymios were required as abbots and spiritual directors. This concession placed need on the *hegoumenoi* to

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<sup>103</sup> Patrich argues that Cyril presents Sabas as the community leader of not only the Great Laura, but all of his monastic foundations. While the other monasteries had administrators (διακηταί), only Sabas was *hegoumenos*. See Patrich, *Sabas*, 169-173.

<sup>104</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 25.23 ὁ τε πόθος τῆς ἡσυχίας.

<sup>105</sup> Cyril, *Life of Euthymius*, 25.25 Cyril also states that prior to this decree by God to begin accepting disciples, Euthymius would pass them along to Theoctistus,

<sup>106</sup> Cyril, *Life of Sabas*, 99.10-15.

have a temporary period during which they could practice the higher ascetic virtues, which Lenten wandering provided.

In addition, while the practice of Lenten wandering is mentioned multiple times in the lives of Sabas and Euthymios, in his subsequent lives, Cyril rarely mentions the practice. Cyril never mentions John the Hesychast, despite his connection with Sabas, as engaging in the practice. Likewise, Cyriacus is mentioned as being brought along by Gerasimus early in his monastic career, however, once he had transitioned to the anchoritic life Cyril never again mentions Cyriacus maintaining the practice.<sup>107</sup> Both of these men, evidenced by Cyril's decision to write their lives, are presented as having the spiritual mastery to engage in the practice, but never do. This is because John and Cyriacus never took on the administrative position of abbot. They had the freedom to practice *hesychia* through enclosure and moving to new locations. Thus, their stillness could be achieved without Lenten wanderings. So then, it was only the *hegoumenoi* who were presented as maintaining the practice of Lenten wandering. Cyril presented the practice as an alternative to maintain the virtues of *xeniteia* and *hesychia*. The temporary mobility allowed Euthymios, Sabas, and Gerasimus to lead their monasteries while still engaging in the personal ascetic development emphasized in the Palestinian monastic communities.

### Conclusions

Throughout this chapter I have opted to use the word mobility in contrast to travel. This has been done so purposefully as we are not just discussing the practice of travel or simply providing instances in which monks went on a journey. Instead we have been interested in a monk's *ability* to move, in their options to visit a holy person or place, to transfer to a different

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<sup>107</sup> Cyril, *Life of Cyriacus*, 225.10.

monastery, or to flee to a desert cell. As has been shown, within the literature of sixth-century Palestinian monasticism, monks not only had the ability to move, but it was an integral element to monasticism and the ascetic life throughout the sixth century.

To return to Justinian's novel with which we began, monks from both Gaza and the Judean Desert were presented as seeking one thing in one place, another in another. However, rather than being at odds with monastic perseverance, mobility was integral to it. The varied forms of movement discussed were all undertaken out of a desire to further the ascetic development and spiritual wellbeing of the involved monks. Rather than being a sign of an erratic mind, it was instead a fulfillment of the monastic life. This divergence in understanding of monasticism and mobility arose out of perspective. Justinian's concern was one of a macroscopic scale; of the place of monasticism as an institution within the empire. Within the monastic literature of Palestine the emphasis remained on the individual. At the core of the ascetic tradition within Palestinian monasticism is what was considered beneficial for the soul of an individual monk and their monastic communities. The freedom to go on pilgrimage, to move between monasteries, to wander the desert were allowed by abbots and spiritual directors because they could assist monks in gaining virtues. The purpose of the monastery was to assist monks in their spiritual progress. If it was truly more beneficial to go elsewhere, either permanently or temporarily, then not allowing a monk to do so would have been a detriment to their way of life rather than favorable.

Moschos' simile of the bee to describe his journeys rings true here, perhaps in more ways than he initially intended. While a bee's flight path might seem erratic, no one would claim that its movements were without purpose. No one would claim that the bee's periods of movement were done without any benefit for itself and its hive. The monk was the same as the bee; both

were driven from place to place with purpose. Despite the dangers, both engaged in temporary mobility due to an internal need which could only be satisfied outside the confines of the community.

## Conclusions

The dissertation has examined the boundaries that scholars have created and emphasized within Palestinian monasticism in the sixth century. Whether based on geographic origins, perceived forms of monasticism, theological leanings, or notions of stability and mobility, there have been numerous ways to divide the communities of the Judean Desert and Gaza. This dissertation complicates these neat divisions and breaks down these constructed walls. By focusing on the idealized ascetic practices and notions of monastic community emphasized in the literature, I have sought to provide an alternative perspective on how the communities of the Judean Desert and Gaza should be connected and how the boundaries between them should be conceived. Rather than examine an individual source or community this dissertation has instead focused on the collective voice of the monastic communities of Palestine, Gaza included, as expressed in the surviving Greek literary productions. Likewise, rather than examine the place of Palestinian authors and monks in the wider ecclesiastical and doctrinal debates of the sixth century, I have instead focused on the monastic culture of Palestine and how wider issues were absorbed into and understood by the monastic communities of Palestine.

Through this perspective the dissertation has revealed the commonalities held regarding the practices of monasticism and the ideal ascetic praxes in the Judean Desert and Gaza. Rather than representing two divergent monastic traditions, they can be understood together as a distinct monastic region in the late antique Mediterranean. The monasteries of Palestine, both in the Judean Desert and Gaza, were populated by individuals originating from various provinces throughout the empire. Many brought with them the monastic traditions from their home provinces. However, after arriving in the region and entering into the local monastic communities these variations coalesced into a unified monastic framework within the region of



Palestine as a whole. While individual communities centered around holy individuals and their legacies formed in the Judean Desert and Gaza, a core of commonality remained which linked monasticism of Palestine together as argued in the first chapter. Just as scholars have written about monasticism in Egypt, Syria, Gaul, or Italy, we should talk about Palestinian monasticism, one in which encompassed the communities of both the Judean Desert and Gaza.

Contrary to some presentations of Judean Desert monasticism, the life of the individual monk remained the focus within the monastic literature of the sixth century. Chapter two revealed that a monk's spiritual journey from novice towards perfection remained at the core of the monastic practice of both the Judean Desert and Gaza and it was around this notion that the proscribed praxes were formed. The literature of both regions emphasized the necessity of a personalized master-disciple relationship. It was to one's spiritual director and abbot that monks must submit themselves and renounce their self-will. It was to them that the monk must remain obedient and, through their continual counsel, gain humility and the other virtues. Along this path, the adoption of *hesychia*, a life of stillness, remained ideal for the spiritually advanced monk. This virtue and the personal master-disciple relationship which led to it remained at the center of monasticism in both the Judean Desert and Gaza. The idea that Judean Desert monasticism had forgone these elements by the sixth century in favor of an on organizational hierarchy and imperial orthodoxy has been a misconception.

As the third chapter discussed, one of the reasons for this misconception was how the sources constructed the images of key monastic figures of the Judean Desert and Gaza, based on the forms of authority that they held. Barsanuphius and John the Prophet fundamentally served in a different position as spiritual directors than Sabas and Euthymios did as abbots. However, this variation should not be understood as representative of an entire region. When the Old Men of

Gaza are compared to the spiritual directors John the Hesychast and Cyriacus of the Judean Desert the commonalities of the regions become clear.

Rather than speculate on the specific theological leanings of the Palestinian authors and their subjects, the fourth chapter instead focused on the role that theology and orthodoxy played within the ascetic life. While there were variances among the sources over the importance of doctrinal identity, the sources of the Judean Desert and Gaza both agreed that theological speculation was not a core component of the ascetic life. Orthodoxy was not proven through rhetoric and biblical citation, but instead the monk should keep their attention fixated on God, who would reveal proper belief through prayer and the miraculous.

While there was a designated monastic *cursus honorum* expressed in the literature in which a monk entered a coenobium for initial ascetic formation, then transitioning to a laura for a semi-achroitic life, and finally to a fully anchoritic life of *hesychia*, this was more of a guideline than something strictly enforced, even for the idealized monks in the sources. The needs of the individual monk and what their spiritual director thought was best for them overshadowed any sort of specific guidelines. Within the Palestinian monastic milieu we have witnessed monks who remained within the coenobium or attached to their spiritual director for the entirety of their lives, monks who remained in the laura, monks who shifted to desert cells, and monks who took up the wandering life of a *boskos*. This emphasis on the self and the individual's personal spiritual needs for the attainment of perfection created the conditions for and encouraged monastic mobility. Palestinian monasticism was built upon mobility as part of its foundation. Movement between monasteries or cells was a central element of asceticism in the region, marking a monk's progression towards perfection. In addition, spiritual directors and disciples did not always live at the same monasteries. The spiritual bonds which existed between

master and disciple were understood as a valid reason for travel, assuming it was beneficial for the soul.

The dissertation has served as a case study, examining how, within a specific context, we can examine and dismantle the entrenched boundaries which further subdivide the field of late antique monasticism. By viewing the regions of the Judean Desert and Gaza as holding a common understanding of monasticism and asceticism, this dissertation provides a broader and more nuanced understanding of monasticism in late antique Palestine. The variances in the strengths of Cyril's opus or Barsanuphius and John's letters can help fill in opposing gaps of knowledge. With the limited sources available to the late antique scholar, it seems to be more beneficial to seek commonalities in our attempts to understand the period rather than seek ways of further dividing the source base. In a period in which much focus has been on doctrinal debates and the division of Christianity, the dissertation has shown an alternative image of monasticism in the period. A depiction in which theological dogma was not the primary or sole focus of individuals. The monastic literature of sixth-century Palestine maintained the importance of the self and an emphasis on inner spirituality and personal relationships. Concern remained focused on what was beneficial for the soul of the individual monk in both the Judean Desert and Gaza.

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